

IT HAPPENED IN JAPAN

To My Brother
MAJOR ARTHUR HAGGARD.

IT HAPPENED IN JAPAN.

BY

BARONESS ALBERT d'ANETHAN

Author of "His Chief's Wife"

"Love Songs and Other Songs"

With Coloured Frontispiece

BY

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CHAPTER I.

RENUNCIATION.

Two men, side by side, were slowly pacing the deck of the *Empress of India* on her outward voyage to Japan. A week had almost passed since the boat had sailed from Vancouver, and the extremely bad weather encountered until this afternoon had prevented all but the most hardened good sailors from penetrating from below. Now, however, the wind and sea had somewhat abated, the first ray of sun had brought the storm-tossed and sea-sick from their berths, and the broad decks were soon swarming with passengers of both sexes, whose faces and general demeanour expressed entire satisfaction at their restored liberty.

Monsieur de Güldenfeldt, the newly-appointed Swedish Minister to Japan, though an experienced and enterprising traveller, was watching this motley crew through his eye-glass with an amused and somewhat quizzical expression. He had seen many such scenes, and yet to his observant mind they were ever new and always

entertaining. He was at the present moment occupied in gazing at a French priest, a German commercial traveller, and a cadaverous-looking Englishman discussing with varied gesticulations some point in the political situation, on which question each appeared as ignorant as he was positive, and he was vaguely wondering what means they would ultimately find to unravel the tangled skein, when he felt his companion, a tall dark man with a black moustache and a distinguished nose, grip him by the arm.

"By Jove, de Güldenfeldt!" exclaimed the latter excidedly, while an unusual air of animation lit up his somewhat sleepy eyes, "Isn't that Mrs. Norrywood? That woman about whom there has been all that fuss, you know. Or am I dreaming?"

Monsieur de Güldenfeldt glanced along the deck and fixed his eyes on a lady who, all unconscious of the notice she was attracting, slowly came towards them.

"Not much doubt on that point, I fancy," he replied, as the tall, graceful figure passed near them. "I've known her for years. As one knows people about Town, you know. Dined with her, and that sort of thing. There's no mistaking her. Sapristi! what a beautiful woman she is! I wonder if Martinworth is on board: if they are together, you know."

Sir Ralph Nicholson pensively stroked his moustache, but did not reply.

"It would give me intense satisfaction to be acquainted with the rights of that story," continued de Güldenfeldt. "It was an uncommonly mixed up affair. Doubtless, Nicholson, you will put me down as a fool, but I believe that I am one of the few people who, after having followed the evidence from the beginning to the end, still believe in her and Martinworth's innocence. Why! you can't look into that woman's eyes, and not feel convinced that she is all right. I defy you to do so."

"My dear fellow, it is just because she looks so uncommonly innocent and pure, and all that sort of thing, that she's probably as bad as they make 'em," replied Sir Ralph sententiously. "You are such a devilishly indulgent fellow, de Güldenfeldt. All the many years that I have known you, and all the time you were posted in London, I hardly ever heard you utter a word against a soul: especially if the individual discussed happened to be a woman. Yet heaven knows, in the course of a long and successful career you must have had plenty of knowledge of the fair sex and their peculiar little ways."

"Believe me, my dear boy," replied de Güldenfeldt somewhat gravely, "women are far more sinned against than sinning. But it's no

earthly use arguing with a juvenile cynic, such as no doubt you consider yourself, on this much disputed point. At present, you have all the censoriousness and hard-heartedness of youth on your side. Only wait ten or fifteen years—till you are my mature age—and then tell me what you think about the matter. But," he added, "to return to our friend Mrs. Norrywood. You have no notion what a brute was Norrywood. It was only after years of neglect and infidelity, even downright cruelty on his part, that his wife took up at last with that nice fellow Martinworth. One only wonders she didn't console herself ages before."

"But surely it was *she* who started the divorce proceedings?"

"Yes. You see one day things came to a climax when she—oh! well, don't let's go over the whole sordid history. Suffice it to say, that no woman with a particle of self-respect could, knowing what she knew, put up a day longer with such a blackguard. Then he—Norrywood—you know, brought the counter charge against her, poor soul, and Lord Martinworth; and at one time things were made to look uncommonly black against them. However, nothing was proved, for the excellent reason, in my opinion, that there was absolutely nothing to prove. And in the end she got her divorce right enough."

"Yes, and everyone said she would marry Martinworth within the year."

"Well, the year is almost past. We shall see whether everyone was right, and whether Martinworth is on board; and if so, in what capacity. Here she comes again. I shall stop and speak to her this time, I think," and Monsieur de Glüdenfeldt, hat in hand, went towards the lady.

"How do you do, Mrs. Norrywood," he said; "how extremely pleasant it is for me to think that we are fated to be travelling companions."

The person addressed stopped a moment in her walk, raising her clear grey eyes, in which lurked a look of annoyance and of slight surprise, to Monsieur de Güldenfeldt's face.

"I think," she said very slowly but very clearly and incisively, "you have made a mistake. I am no long—I am not Mrs. Norrywood. My name is Nugent," and with a slight bow she swept past him.

With a look of stupefaction on his expressive face, Monsieur de Güldenfeldt's outstretched hand fell slowly to his side as he stared after the retreating form.

He turned slowly round to Sir Ralph, who had been watching the whole incident with interest and considerable amusement.

"Tell me, Ralph," he exclaimed," "am I dreaming? Is it not Mrs. Norrywood? Is it her

double? But what a fool I am," he added; "of course there is not a doubt of it. The fact is, my dear boy, that I—I, Stanislas de Güldenfeldt, have been deliberately cut by one of the prettiest and smartest women in Town. A by no means pleasant experience, I can tell you!" and Monsieur de Güldenfeldt, with a twinkle in his blue eyes, gave a little shake to his shoulders that was distinctly foreign and decidedly expressive.

"Yes," smiled Nicholson, "if she had snubbed a nobody like me, now, there would have been nothing to be surprised at. Precious glad, though, I didn't give her the chance," he added, with a cheery laugh. "I should never have survived it, whereas a diplomat like you can of course, get even with her any day. Forgive my laughing, de Güldenfeldt, but really it was rather a comic spectacle for an onlooker, you know."

"Laugh away, laugh away, my dear boy. Perhaps, however, when your hilarity has spent itself, you will kindly help me to unravel this mystery. What the dickens does it mean, eh?"

"Oh! I don't think we need go very far for an explanation. Probably she is going out to the Antipodes to try and start afresh. Of course, the first step towards that operation is to wipe out the past. So she begins by cutting her old friends, you see. 'Pon my word, I admire her pluck. But I shall take warning from your adventure, and be-

fore making a move shall wait with resignation until Mrs. Norrywood—I beg her pardon—Mrs. Nugent, condescends to recognise in me a former acquaintance. It's a beastly bore being snubbed by a pretty woman, isn't it old fellow? Come, don't eat me, but let's go below and see if Martinworth's name is among the list of passengers."

Meanwhile the subject of the above conversation was standing in her cabin, and with flushed cheeks and a beating heart was thinking deeply. This meeting with two members of the set in which she had originally moved had come upon her as a most unpleasant shock, a shock for which she was totally unprepared. Indeed, she had been so taken by surprise that she had behaved, as she told herself now, in a most unwarrantably tactless manner. Both de Güldenfeldt and Nicholson she had known fairly well in the old days, and in calmly thinking over the circumstances of the meeting, it struck her what a false step she had made in this crude attempt of ignoring persons whom, indeed, it was impossible to ignore. She remembered now having read in a paper before leaving England, that de Güldenfeldt had been named Swedish Minister to the Court of Japan, in which case she knew that sooner or later she was bound to come across him again, and as for Nicholson, it did not take her long to recall that

his relations with Lord Martinworth had been in former years of the most friendly nature.

The meeting with these two men brought back vividly to Pearl all the wretchedness of her past life, and it was only now that she realised to the full the intense relief and sense of freedom that filled her soul, as she stepped aboard the Atlantic Liner at Southampton, and had watched the coast-line of England fade—as she then had sincerely hoped—for ever from her eyes.

Sir Ralph Nicholson had judged the situation rightly. Pearl Norrywood, or Nugent, had left England with the firm intention of forgetting everything connected with her unhappy past. She was determined, as far as it was possible, to wipe out all the despair, the hatred, the humiliation of the last ten years of her life. But in doing this, she felt there could be no half measures. That in company with the misery must also be obliterated all the joy and happiness she had experienced in the one love of her existence. She told herself that with this blotting out of the past, Dick Martinworth must be sacrificed with the rest. There was a decision of character, a certain sternness in her nature which she knew would help her to carry out that determination, and from the day that she and Lord Martinworth left the Divorce Court a suspected, but in spite of all, an unconvicted couple, Pearl Nugent had

never again seen the man who for a series of years had exercised so great an influence over her life.

She had been but little past twenty when she put her future into the charge of a husband whom three months later she learned to utterly loathe and fear. From that time, every day, every hour, was a fiery ordeal from which, indeed, but few women could have hoped to escape unscathed. The inevitable arose ere long in the appearance on the scene of the Honourable Dick Pelham, as he was in those far-away days. Mr. Pelham had at once been struck by the refined beauty and grace of the girl with sad grey eyes. Then in getting to know her well he learnt to pity her, a feeling which ultimately culminated before many months passed into a deep and passionate love.

It did not indeed take Pelham long to learn that he worshipped the very ground on which Pearl trod, and no great interval passed before he told her so. The world never knew, never would know, whether Pearl Norrywood had listened to these protestations. All that it saw was that she behaved as if she had done so, for from the day that Dick Pelham commenced to haunt her side she became another person. She developed into an extremely beautiful woman. The grey eyes lost their sadness, the lovely lips

learned to smile, and there was a radiance over the whole charming face that is only seen around those who love. The world put down this wonderful transformation to the presence of Dicky Pelham, and for once the world was right.

Society indeed at this period of their existence was more than indulgent to Pearl and Mr. Pelham. With the indifference and cynicism which characterises a certain class, not only did it condone, but it appeared on the contrary to encourage Pelham's devotion, to smile with approbation upon the marked and evident intimacy existing between this happy and good-looking couple. To invite one without the other would have indeed shown a total *manque de savoir faire*, and the same post that carried a letter begging Pearl's presence at a certain entertainment, or a certain house, as a matter of course conveyed another to Mr. Pelham containing the same request.

And yet, if the truth were known, this inseparableness, this constant daily companionship, was apt at times to prove to both more of a trial than a joy, more of a curse than a blessing. On Pelham's side it was a never-ending, feverish dream of unsatisfied desire, which Pearl was eternally resisting, eternally fighting against with all the weapons of her decidedly religious training, and a genuine and innate purity of heart.

And thus matters remained for the next five

or six years. Dick Pelham succeeded in course of time to the title, and blossomed into Lord Martinworth, and his devotion to Pearl instead of cooling increased in intensity as time went on. One day, after years of waiting and imploring, he finally succeeded in persuading Mrs. Norrywood to take the decisive step of issuing divorce proceedings against her husband. This had long been his aim. But not only Pearl's hatred of open scandal and publicity, but her better judgment had prevented her hitherto from listening to his persuasions and from acceding to his unwearying entreaties. A severe, and what indeed might have proved a fatal injury from a blow bestowed in one of his ungovernable rages by the husband who had tortured her for so many years, finally however, decided Pearl to give ear to Martinworth's prayers, and at length to go to the extremity of suing for a divorce.

She succeeded, after days of suspense, in obtaining her divorce. But whereas she had entered the court with the smiles and approbation of the world, she left it with a ruined reputation, a social outcast, and with hardly a friend to hold out a helping hand. The decree *nisi* had indeed been dearly bought, and as Pearl drove away from the Divorce Court she was the first to realise and to acknowledge to herself that in obtaining her

freedom she had, from a worldly point of view, brought about her own doom.

As the judgment was pronounced, Martinworth cast her one radiant glance, which expressed as plainly as words "At last you are mine. At last! at last! after all these years." But there was no answering look of triumph in Pearl's eyes, for at that moment she felt that never again could she raise them to the face of man. In after times she often wondered how she had lived through all those awful days, how she could have remained silent, drinking in that terrible evidence which her husband had raked up from the very gutters. Nevertheless she survived this truly distressing ordeal, and with a look of utter scorn on her face sat patiently listening to servants' lies, and to sordid details of innocent situations, which under the clever cross examination were transformed into all that seemed most guilty and most damaging to her cause.

She walked away that day with Martinworth, and as she passed into her carriage people whispered together and nudged each other. Nothing had been proved,—and yet, in the eyes of her world, she knew that everything had been proved.

"But, of course, she will marry Martinworth now," it said. "He is only too willing to make the position a regular one. That is why she put Norrywood into the Divorce Court, though evi-

dently she never dreamt the old fox would succeed thus thoroughly in turning the tables on her. She has really been somewhat of a fool for her pains. Why didn't she let things go on as they were? Why did she want to put old Norry's back up? She had just as much liberty before as she will have now, and if she had left him alone we should never have heard all these abominable things about her. Of course, before this scandalous case it was easy enough to feign ignorance of all their goings on. Now she has put herself outside the pale altogether, and in spite of that ridiculous verdict one really cannot continue the acquaintance. No doubt, once she is Martinworth's wife,—though of course she won't go to Court—their country neighbours will call on her, and she is just the sort of woman to be adored by the poor people. Pity we can't see her any more. Such a sweet woman, you know," etc., etc., etc.

Pearl knew her world. She heard words such as these ringing in her ears, and as on the doorstep of her house she said good-bye to Lord Martinworth, she vowed to herself never would she see him again. She was an innocent woman, whatever the world might call her. Her first desire had been to have a certain satisfaction in disappointing the cynics of their laughter, and by not marrying the man whose name had so long been coupled with hers, and whom every-

one had without doubt expected her to marry, to prove indisputably her innocence. But that was only a momentary thought. Worthier reasons against this union soon took root in her mind. She loved Martinworth with all her soul. The knowledge flashed upon her, that only by not marrying him could she prove her devotion to the man who would willingly have sacrificed all —his position in society, his future, his life's ambitions—by bestowing on her the protection of his name.

That night all Pearl Norrywood's possessions were packed. When her arrangements were completed she sent away her maid, and set herself to the task of writing a letter. It took her a long, long time that letter, and tears were streaming down her cheeks as she penned these words:—

"I am leaving you, my darling; for I can "never be your wife. Dick! you must not "blame me for this, for it is just because of "my great love for you that I can never take "your name. The woman who shares that "name must never have had the vile things "said of her that have been said of me in that "horrible Court, this last week. You, in your "great love and generosity, had but one "thought when my freedom was pronounced "—I read it in your eyes, dear. But all "during those dreadful hours it was gradu-

"ally becoming clear to me, I was slowly "realising, that for your sake alone, I must "never give the world the right of confirming "what the world has said. Had I only "myself to think of I would, as you know, "scorn what people may say, and now that I "am free I would marry you, and at last taste "what true happiness is. But, Dick, you are "a public man. You have a great name and "high position to maintain, and the woman "who bears that name must be above sus- "picion. Dick! you are no child. You are "a man of the world and of experience, and "therefore I beg of you to look around among "your acquaintances and friends and to ask "yourself if there is a single one who, in spite "of the verdict to-day, will believe in our "innocence? Such being the case, how can "I ruin your life by marrying you?

"I feel no bashfulness in writing this "before you speak to me again, for by "expressing my decision I thus make it "impossible for you ever to speak. Yes, "Dick, I am leaving you for ever—for ever. "Do not attempt to find me. All your "efforts will be fruitless, and oh! indeed, "indeed! this separation will be far better "for us both. Do not become hard against "me, Dick, for you will know—you must

"believe, dearest, that it is only my love
"that induces me to leave you. One day you
"will marry some pure young girl, and you
"will then bless me for trying to rectify the
"evil that I have done you, and you will per-
"haps forgive me for the years that you have
"wasted with me. And yet, if having made
"a woman in her darkest hour happy, if
"having prevented a heart from becoming
"cold and callous and cruel, if having cast
"many glorious rays of sunshine around an
"existence which, without you, would have
"been one dark abyss, if having blessed me
"with your beautiful, strong, supporting
"love, if, having done and given all this,
"you think your years have been wasted, let
"me tell you, Dick, they have not—they have
"not! And now I bid you farewell. What
"it costs me to write that word, I alone can
"know. For with it I vanish from your life.
"If I were strong I should say 'Forget me,'
"but you know me as a poor weak woman,
"and knowing me thus you will understand
"that I can only say 'Forgive me.'

"PEARL."

For several months Pearl Nugent lived in an obscure Welsh village, buried like a hermit. She was awaiting an answer to a letter she had written to Japan, and in due course it arrived. It

was a satisfactory letter, welcoming her to the Land of the Rising Sun. Immediately on obtaining her divorce she had written to her cousin, Mrs. Rawlinson, begging her to secure a house for her either in Yokohama or Tokyo, and to make other arrangements subject to her approaching arrival.

Mrs. Rawlinson, who was some years senior to to the girl she loved as a younger sister, was the wife of an Englishman engaged by the Japanese Government. She was a clever and large-minded woman. Many a time had her kind heart ached for Pearl, and when the divorce proceedings commenced she had prayed but for one conclusion. The complication connected with Lord Martinworth had certainly proved somewhat of a shock to her well-ordered mind, but in spite of the compromising evidence, not for one instant did she allow herself to believe the worst, and the personal love and pity she felt for the poor, storm-tossed girl, coupled with Pearl's frank and affectionate letter, made her long for the day when she could fold and comfort her within her motherly arms.

Pearl had merely stated facts, and had asked for no advice. She knew her cousin well enough to be confident that none would be offered unasked.

There was only one other person to acquaint with her decision. Mr. Hall was her lawyer and

trustee, an old and valued friend of her father's. Many a time when a child had he dandled her on his knee, and to him Pearl now opened her whole heart, for certain business formalities had to be transacted connected with her change of residence and of name, and with regard to her fortune, which though not large, would be amply sufficient for her needs. During all those dreary months Mr. Hall was the only friend she saw. He ran down from Town constantly, armed as a rule with documents to sign, and the appearance of this bright, cheery little man, with a face like a russet apple, was Pearl's one pleasure during that period of grief and solitude.

One day, when she had been in hiding a considerable time, he paid her one of his welcome visits. On this occasion, contrary to his habits, he appeared grave and preoccupied, and it was only after a certain time that, with a little preliminary cough, he seemed to make up his mind to speak.

He took Pearl's hand between his own.

"My dear," he said gravely, "I want to ask you something. May I?"

"Yes, Mr. Hall, of course you are privileged to say anything to me. What is it?"

"Pearl, has it never struck you that Lord Martinworth would hardly be likely to rest satisfied with the request contained in your letter?"

"He has been looking for me?" exclaimed Pearl, flushing.

"Yes, he has been moving heaven and earth to find you. Necessarily, his first step was to come to me."

"And—you said—what?"

"What could I say, but that I was in your confidence, and that I declined to betray it?"

"And you told him nothing—nothing?"

"No, in spite of prayers and threats, I of course divulged nothing."

Was it a shade of disappointment that for a moment clouded Pearl's eyes Mr. Hall found himself wondering? At any rate, there was a pause before she continued in a low voice:

"You were quite—quite right, Mr. Hall. Thank you. Then you think he has got no trace?"

"Even with the aid of detectives whom, I hear, he has since been employing, I don't fancy he has so far discovered your whereabouts. But—but——"

"But—you think there is danger that he may do so?"

"I should say there was every danger. For one thing, he could easily have me followed."

He hesitated, then continued: "My dear child, you have honoured me with your entire confidence in this matter, and you must not think that I wish to take advantage of this fact if, before

you finally decide to take this important step, I beg of you to reconsider. You love this man, and he loves you. His dearest wish—I know from his own lips—is to make you his wife. Think what you are giving up, Pearl, by flinging this all away, by flying from him. Love, happiness, honour. You—"

"Forgive me, my dear old friend," interrupted Pearl, "love and happiness I know, but not honour, no, not honour."

She rose from her seat and stood by Mr. Hall's side. Her eyes were wet with tears. "No," she repeated in a low voice, "not honour. I should never gain honour by marrying Lord Martinworth, for in marrying him I should despise myself. Think of the ruin to him! Knowing this—feeling this all the time, should I not, as the years went on, learn to hate myself for being the cause of his sacrifice? And though he is so good, so generous, I know he would never show me he had repented of the step, my own intuition would be sufficient. No words would be necessary to tell me that I had been the destroyer of his life, the stumbling block in the realisation of his hopes and of his ambitions. Oh! Mr. Hall, my only friend, do not turn against me, do not tempt me. I have told you this before, many and many a time, and you listened and understood. Do not, I pray you, at the last moment, try to convince me that I am

unwise, that I am wrong, when I know—I know I am doing the only thing that can possibly be right."

She paused, but Mr. Hall did not break the silence.

"If," she continued with a deeper note of appeal, "if there were only myself to consider in this matter, do you think there could be a moment's hesitation on my part? Do you think I should care what my world might say—what it would be *sure to say if I married Lord Martinworth? Not* I! No fear of the opinion of a few people who once called themselves my friend, would make me hesitate in realising that happiness for which I have so long pined, and which at one time I thought was so nearly mine.

"But now dear friend," she laid her hand upon his arm, "let us, I beg you, dismiss this subject, dismiss it for ever. You know my feelings on this matter, and once more I implore you not to try to persuade me against those feelings. Indeed," she continued, smiling through her tears, "it would be useless, for I received a letter two days ago from Mrs. Rawlinson, and have consequently taken my passage by the 'Paris,' sailing in a few weeks from Southampton for New York. So you see the die is cast."

Pearl Nugent's affairs occupied Mr. Hall's thoughts considerably as he travelled back to

Town that afternoon. "Hum!" he said to himself, as he unfolded his newspaper and adjusted his spectacles to the right angle on his nose. "She thinks herself sincere, poor child, when she says it is all for Martinworth's sake she doesn't marry him, but Pearl Norrywood—or Nugent, as she insists on calling herself now—hasn't been a woman of society for ten years for nothing; and she has more consideration for the opinion of that world over which she reigned so long than she has any notion of. She is an innocent woman, but as proud as Lucifer. I know her, bless her soul! She'll be hanged if she lets society have the satisfaction of having the laugh on its side. Of course, she firmly believes she is sacrificing herself for Martinworth's sake, but it's confounded nonsense, all the same. I know my Pearl. Her beastly pride is at the bottom of everything. Damn it! Why can't she marry the man and have done with it?"

Which soliloquy of the worthy old lawyer's proves that even our best friends are apt to misjudge us sometimes.

Meanwhile we have left Pearl Nugent standing in her cabin debating with herself what she ought to do. She stood plunged in thought, realising more and more into what a false position her impulsiveness had led her. It went without saying she had mortally offended Monsieur de Gülden-

feldt. She, who could not afford to make a single enemy, however humble his position, had doubtless by this rash action incurred the lasting aversion of one who by the holding up of his little finger might do her such irretrievable harm in this new life upon which she was about to enter. She saw it all clearly enough now, and poor Pearl laughed a little hollow laugh of wretchedness as she began to make the few alterations in her dress necessary for the shipboard dinner. If she had been somewhat vainer she would have been consoled by the remembrance that she belonged to a world where the fascination and charm and beauty of woman are still dominant features. But Pearl's self-esteem of late had suffered too severe a blow for her to put great store on either her beauty or her qualities of fascination; though if she had known not only her own powers, but Monsieur de Güldenfeldt, somewhat better, she need never have passed through that disagreeable period of regret and apprehension.

At dinner, considerably to her dismay, she found herself placed between her two quondam friends. She arrived rather late at table, and with flushed cheeks and a slight bow to each, sat down. Her soup went away untouched. Then finally taking her courage in both hands, she resolutely turned towards the Swedish Minister.

"Monsieur de Güldenfeldt," she said with a

slightly tremulous voice, "I must ask your pardon for my rude, and what must indeed seem to you, inexplicable behaviour of this afternoon. Will you—will you believe that I was labouring under a misapprehension, and be generous enough to accept this as my only explanation?"

It was very simply said, and Monsieur de Güldenfeldt answered her request as simply. He looked at the beautiful and perplexed face with a mixture of admiration and amusement in his eyes.

"Let us forget the past, Mrs.—Mrs.—Nugent," he said, "and begin afresh. Shall we?"

And from that day commenced a friendship which was to prove an important factor in Pearl Nugent's life.

CHAPTER II.

IN LOTUS-LAND.

Pearl Nugent had every reason to congratulate herself on her energy in having renounced her old life and surroundings, for the three years passed in Tokyo had proved the happiest, and certainly the most peaceful, of her hitherto somewhat stormy existence.

On her first arrival in Japan she had remained for some weeks—until she had settled herself in her own house—with her cousin, Mrs. Rawlinson. It had been a profitable and happy time for both, and for Pearl especially the association at this uncertain period of her life with a woman like Rosina Rawlinson, was beneficial in every respect.

Everybody in Tokyo knew, respected, and loved Rosina, as she was generally called behind her back. It was Rosina to whom one flew for advice when placed in a slight difficulty, or for comfort when overcome by a great trouble. It was Rosina who would get up in the middle of the night to nurse a sick child, and it was she who received the confidences of the various

young men and women of the community, received them with bright sympathy, and however trifling, kept them secretly locked within her own breast. Again it was to Rosina, or to Rosina's husband, that everybody of importance seemed to bring letters of introduction, and many was the helpless and inexperienced globe-trotter whose appeal for aid had been listened to by Rosina' Above all, it was Rosina who gave the jolliest cheeriest little Bridge dinners in Tokyo, dinners where the wine and food were both above reproach, and where the most amusing people, and those most congenial to each other, were sure to be gathered together.

Those little dinners of Rosina's were alone enough to make her the most popular person in Japan.

For the first fortnight after Pearl's arrival, to her infinite relief, Mrs. Rawlinson, with her usual tact, had closed her doors to every one.

"You will soon see enough of the people, my dear," she said, "without the necessity of being bored just at present. You and I have plenty to talk about, heaven knows! So we'll just sit over the fire and yarn, as that dear sailor boy of mine calls it, until we are both hoarse. I sent my niece Amy away on purpose, for I knew you would have many things to say to me that it's as well she should know nothing about, and, as for Tom, he

doesn't count, you know, for he's at his office all day, and he sleeps all the evening. He is a dear old thing, but I can't say he's a particularly lively husband. He says I do the talking for both, but even in that case one expects more than a grunt as a reply, and I assure you that is often all he vouchsafes me."

"And Amy?" asked Pearl, "has she grown up as pretty as she promised to be? I haven't seen her for four years now, for you remember I was abroad all that last year she was at school at Brighton."

"I am anxious to know what you think of Amy," responded Mrs. Rawlinson. "Out here she is considered a beauty. But of course, coming straight from Europe as you do, and accustomed to seeing all the loveliest women in Paris and in London, you may think nothing of her. People tell me she is the handsomest girl in Japan, and certainly I have seen no one with such glorious eyes or brilliant colouring. But I may be prejudiced in her favour, and therefore, my dear, I am quite anxious to have your opinion. One thing, however, I do know, and that is she is the most terrible flirt that ever was born. What I have gone through, my dear Pearl, with that girl no one knows. She has had heaps of offers—good ones, you know, from diplomats and people in excellent positions, but my lady turns up that

pretty nose of hers at one and all. Pure conceit I call it, for she knows she is penniless. I always tell her that under the circumstances she is lucky to have had an offer at all."

"Yes," replied Pearl, "girls at home are now beginning to find that offers of marriage are not to be had by merely looking pretty, or even by being clever and amusing. The practical, modern young man generally thinks of his pocket before all other considerations. Looks and intelligence are quite in the minority, I assure you."

"Of course! But I might just as well speak to a stone wall as to discuss the advantages of matrimony with Amy. And then, you know, she behaves so badly. She never shows the least repentance when she refuses these men one after the other. She says she knows none of them will break their hearts about her, and that she has not the slightest intention of wasting her sympathy over people who doubtless one and all will be consoled in less than three months. Such nonsense, you know, and so hard-hearted! Yes, certainly Amy is a strange girl. She is really rather a trial to me sometimes. Yet, in spite of all her faults, she is wonderfully lovable. I think you will discover this fact on your own account."

But three years had passed since this and many such conversations, and Pearl Nugent one lovely Spring morning was seated in her garden, in the

neighbourhood of some magnificent flowering cherry trees, idly thinking of what those years had brought her.

Pearl's was a perfect Japanese garden. It was a garden of the past, a poem—a creation of an art whose charm and loveliness only a Japanese can produce. She was seated on the curved branch of a very ancient pine. A few feet distant from her stood a little stone shrine, chipped and blemished, and covered with thick grown moss, while on her left were uneven rocks, and quaint-shaped basins of various forms and designs. Two stone lanterns, green with age, formed on her right a sort of entrance to the miniature lake dotted with tiny islands and surrounded by knolls of bright green grass, from the smooth surface of which rose the spreading cherry trees, now in full bloom. Some of these cherry trees had great gnarled trunks, and were very ancient. Their fallen petals, covering the turf, formed a carpet like delicate pink snow, while above was one glorious burst of blossom, hiding every branch in its mantle of perfect form and beauty.

In and out of the little knolls and hills and elevations, which were reached by stone steps of various shapes, were sanded paths which looked as if they never were meant to be trod upon, and to prevent such a desecration flat, queer shaped stepping stones were placed in strange and irregu-

lar positions. Everything was irregular and unexpected in this fascinating garden. Flowers were rare, but fine old trees abounded, and shrubs and ancient pines,—some allowed to grow at their own sweet will, others dwarfed in stature, and trimmed by careful training into fantastic and uncanny shapes.

Beyond was a distant view of Fujiyama still wrapped in its white mantle, though great bare places streaked the mountain, forming weird shadows where the snow had already melted. Pearl felt a certain companionship in this grand old mountain, solitary like herself. She would sit for hours watching it in all its different, but ever lovely aspects, at one time in its snowy covering almost dazzling the eyes in the brilliant morning sunshine, and later on at eventide but vaguely distinct through banks of heavy purple clouds, till gradually fading from view, Fuji would become merged into the fading sky, finally disappearing into the shadows of the darkening night.

Her eyes were dreamily fixed on Fuji now, standing out white and clear. She was not alone, for de Güldenfeldt lay stretched on the grass at her feet. His eyes, however, were employed in studying and admiring what at that moment he considered far more beautiful, far more entrancing, than any mountain in the world—namely, his companion's face.

Pearl was looking considerably younger and handsomer still than when she had left England. Ease of mind and a quiet life had accomplished their work, and the sweet placid face bore no traces of the storms that for a time had marred its beauty, and somewhat hardened its expression. Her past life was to her like an unhappy dream, from which she awoke, to discover with a feeling of infinite relief that it was indeed but a dream, a dream that had faded away for ever. She would find herself in her idle moments, trying to piece the past together, and failing most strangely in the attempt. The utterly miserable life she had spent with her husband, her long moral struggle with Martinworth, those terrible scenes in the Divorce Court, all the incidents of those bitter ten years,—now seemed one and all, like a vanishing and almost forgotten vision. At times she would deliberately set herself to the task of the retrospection of each miserable occurrence, each wretched episode, for there were periods when her present happiness had the effect of almost terrifying her—it seemed so impossible, so unreal. She would then tell herself that it were best and wisest that she should attempt to recall what once had been her life, what once had been her sorrow and despair.

Could this happiness, could this peace of mind really be hers? Would it not fade as a dream

even as her past was so quickly vanishing from her mind? How strange! how very strange! she often thought, that she should experience this difficulty in remembering. Even Dick Martinworth was becoming a faint shadow, whose features, voice, and manner she often found it hard to recall. And yet she told herself she loved him as much as ever. She would place his photograph before her and try to remember scenes where they had been together, words that had been spoken between them, and she would be angry with herself to find how difficult it was for her to picture those scenes, to recollect those words. All seemed so far—so very far away, and somewhat to her dismay, Pearl was beginning to realise that she had almost achieved the object in view when she left England—that of complete obliteration, entire forgetfulness of the past.

"The world forgetting, by the world forgot," she quoted half aloud as she rose from her seat and stretched out her hand to pluck a branch of the heavily-laden cherry tree. "Such is now my life, but I do not complain, for it has certainly many advantages—especially one. No one here ever seems to care to ask awkward questions, and if they know my secret they treat me none the worse for it. *Is* it known, Monsieur de Güldenfeldt?" she inquired suddenly of her companion.

The question came very abruptly, so abruptly,

that the Swedish Minister paused before replying. This was the first time since their meeting on the boat three years ago, that Pearl, in spite of her close friendship with Stanislas de Güldenfeldt, had in any way referred to her past history. He looked up quickly, wondering what was working in her mind.

"Why do you ask me that, my dear lady?" he eventually inquired, flicking the ash from his cigarette.

"Yes, why do I ask it?" she echoed. "Why do we ever wish to know anything that may possibly prove painful to us? Why not rest satisfied with this happy, dreamy, forgetting life? Why not, indeed? What a true lotus eater I have become since I came to live in this poetical, beautiful Japan. I hardly know myself. My life glides along, and I take no count of the hours, nor of the days, and to me it is indeed 'always afternoon.'

'With half closed eyes ever to seem
Falling asleep in a half dream.'

Such, indeed, has been my life since I fled to this 'far-off land.' It is delicious, it is almost perfect. But it must not continue, for I know it is enervating. Yes, and what is more, my dear friend, downright demoralising."

"You use strong words, Mrs. Nugent," replied de Güldenfeldt, raising himself on his elbow, and

gazing into her flushed face with a look of lurking amusement. "What has upset you to-day?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Pearl impatiently, "I have been feeling for some time that I ought not to go on in this aimless, indifferent way. It is only quite lately that I bothered about anything—what people might think of me, you know. But the idea has taken possession of me, and I cannot get free from it. So I decided that I would ask you to tell me, for I shall surely get the truth from you. Do they know?" she repeated, fixing her clear grey eyes on his face. "Do they know that I am deceiving them—that I am a fraud, that my name is not really Nugent? Do they know that my husband and I are divorced? Do they know—do they know—about?—Do they know—everything?"

"And you expect me to answer all these questions?" said de Güldenfeldt slowly.

"Yes, I do. I expect you to be perfectly honest and frank with me. It is the least you can do for me, for you call yourself my friend. And, indeed," she added, with her sweet smile, "ever since the day that I first put my feet on these shores you have proved yourself my best, my truest friend."

"Now, I wonder why it should be the duty of a so-called friend to be given the disagreeable task of announcing disagreeable facts," responded de

Güldenfeldt pensively. "And indeed, Mrs. Nugent, what good will it do if I repeat all the gossip that is bound to go on in a place like this? You can't stop it, you know, any more than you can hope to turn the tide."

"Then they do gossip about me?" continued Pearl with persistency.

"Of course they do."

"And what do they say?"

"Oh, heavens! give me a woman for tenacity of purpose!" exclaimed de Güldenfeldt, rising and stretching his long limbs. "By the by," he continued, suddenly changing the subject, "do you know that Nicholson arrived in Yokohama yesterday? I thought, in spite of his hasty departure over eighteen months ago now, the attractions of Japan would ultimately prove too strong for him."

"Amy refused him, you know. But I believe she really liked him all the time. Are you thinking of her when you speak of attractions?"

"I should say she is the sole and only one. I know at the time he was awfully hard hit. It was our conversation that made me think of him. Never shall I forget the way he stuck up for you one evening at the Club, when that little brute Reichter—who has left, thank God—came out with some garbled version of your story. *Mon Dieu* I didn't Nicholson give it him, just! He is

such a lazy, *nonchalant* beggar that one never expected to see him fly into such a passion. We all stood aghast, while he lashed the mean little brute with his sarcastic tongue. Yes! you have got a loyal, good friend in Nicholson, Mrs. Nugent."

"And another in you. Yet you change the conversation to avoid telling me what I want so much to know. It is not very kind of you, I think."

"Well, I suppose you will get your way in the end," de Güldenfeldt replied, with a smile, "so I may as well surrender without further hesitation. Yes, people know your story, Mrs. Nugent. However strictly your cousin Mrs. Rawlinson, Nicholson and I have kept the secret, it has somehow oozed out. I firmly believe that it was those globe-trotters—the Clive-Carnishers, who, recognising you at the last Chrysanthemum Party, set it about. At any rate, it is known at the English Legation who you really are, for Thomson spoke to me about it one day. You see," he added deprecatingly, "if you had never entertained, if you had been ugly and stupid and uninteresting, people certainly would not have troubled their heads about you, nor have gone to the bother of raking up old stories. But being what you are, charming and beautiful, no matter if you hide yourself in the moon, no matter if you change

your name a dozen times, no matter if you live the life of a hermit—your story, dear lady, will follow you to the end of your existence. There! Now I have given in and told you the truth, and what good will it do you, I should like to know?"

"It has already eased my mind considerably, only that," replied Pearl, "I don't know what has possessed me of late, but I have felt as if I were a cheat—a fraud. You see, I have grown fond of the people here, both Japanese and Europeans, and I have begun to recognise that I was rewarding their kindness but indifferently. Because I was Rosina's cousin, everyone, when I first came, received me with open arms. Then I think they got to like me a little for my own sake. Now you tell me they know my story. Well, this shows, at any rate, that I was right in leaving England, and choosing instead this dear Japan as my home. It is only in a place like this that one would find so much kindness, so much indulgence. The foreign community is so small, so very restricted you see, that I suppose people can't afford to be too exclusive, too particular," she added, rather bitterly.

De Güldenfeldt did not reply. He knew there was considerable truth in Pearl's remarks. If Mrs. Nugent had remained in England she would henceforth, necessarily, have only been

received on sufferance. She would by degrees have sunk into the ranks of *les déclassées*, with no fixed abode, reduced to wandering from second-rate watering-places to out-of-the-way continental towns, seeking rest and finding none. Thus her youth, embittered and disappointed, would finally have passed, and she who formerly had ever been welcome within the portals of good society, would have found herself crawling on her knees, discrowned, outside those closed gates. Here, on the contrary, in the limited European society of the facile East, in spite of varied and garbled versions of her story being known, not only did she receive and was received, but she was considered an acquisition, indeed, much sought after for her beauty and sweetness, her charm and many social talents.

As de Güldenfeldt walked away from Pearl's house that day he was very pensive. The knowledge that he loved Pearl Nugent came as nothing fresh to his mind. He had been fully aware of this fact since their encounter long ago on board the Canadian Pacific liner. At that time however, if anyone had ventured to tell him he would have ever contemplated marrying a woman who had gone through Pearl's unfortunate experiences, a woman who had been tarred by the dirty brush of the Divorce Court, he would have

been the first to have scouted the idea as utterly impossible and absurd.

Stanislas de Güldenfeldt was extremely ambitious. His profession was his god, and ever since the day he had entered on his career all his natural tastes and longings, all his passions and desires, had been subservient to this love of his profession and to the determination to excel. He was possessed of many talents and a considerable amount of good looks, which gifts, combined with great charm of manner and the attractions of his position, all helped to made him a favourite with men and women alike. But a natural cautiousness of disposition, together with this ruling love of his profession, caused him to feel general indifference as far as women were concerned, and though he certainly affected their society, and was never otherwise than courteous and charming towards them, he had, with but one or two exceptions been but little influenced by the feminine sex throughout his life. These exceptions had on each occasion proved themselves episodes rather of a pleasant than of a painful nature He had experienced nevertheless, a certain relief when in the natural course of events these chapters of his life were closed, and with a mind free from all outward influences, once more he could devote his time and his thoughts entirely to his work. He would tell himself that in the abstract he

admired women, that on the whole he thought them superior to his own sex. Then he would find himself wondering how it was that in spite of this undoubted admiration, and what indeed might almost be called veneration, he had really loved them so seldom, why the real depths of his nature had been so little stirred, so little troubled by their presence. He knew the answer to that question well enough, but he would seldom give it even to himself, for he frequently felt irritated with himself at this entire absorption in his work, and above all for what he was wont at times to fancy was an absolute want of sentiment in his nature.

And yet as he emerged from Pearl Nugent's garden that spring morning, Monsieur de Güldenfeldt realised to the full what he had more or less known for three years past—that he was even as others were, and that he could love, love with the full power of his long pent-up feelings, and learning this fact, instead of blessing he lamented his fate. He thought of Pearl with her distinguished yet perfectly simple air. He thought of the straight, clear-cut profile, and the firm, rather square little chin, of those pure and clear grey eyes, and the habit she had of doubling her fingers tightly into the palms of her hands. He thought of those many outward examples of her firm and reliant character—and his heart sank

He felt he desired her above everything in the wide world, and he knew as surely as he knew he was himself that if he wished to gratify that desire he must marry her. Stanislas de Güldenfeldt had not studied Pearl's character for three years for nothing. He was confident in his own mind that she had never listened to Martinworth's entreaties, and he knew that in spite of the irregularity of her present position—perhaps for that very reason—there was a pride, a certain hardness in her nature, that would debar him from venturing to propose any union but one which, in the eyes of the world, was strictly conventional and correct.

That day de Güldenfeldt, whistling for his dogs, started on a solitary walk of some miles, far away from the stir and haste of the city. It was a perfect spring day, with a soft breeze blowing, and a hot sun overhead. Stanislas skirted the fields, already bright with the young corn, his eyes lingering on the beauty of the rich and varied foliage, and on the little knolls of many a secluded and shaded grove fringed with clumps of feathery bamboos and an occasional palm waving aloft in the balmy air Contrasting with the vivid and many shaded greens, and always on the loftiest hill, half hidden in the shadiest spot of the neighbourhood, would be visible the red portal or *torii* of some little shrine raised to *Inari Sama*—the

god of farming—or perhaps to some other deity of the province, while away in the distance rose a range of purple mountains, and on the east a streak of sea gleamed like silver in the bright afternoon sun. He crossed more than one stream of water, in the cool depths of which groups of stark naked urchins were frisking in the wild abandoned gambols of happy childhood. Peasant women of all ages, wrapped in their scanty upper garments and blue cotton trousers, far more resembling men than members of the gentler sex, would pass along the road, bent and almost hidden beneath overwhelming burdens of huge bundles of faggots, yet ever ready with a cheerful greeting as they toiled on towards the thatched farm houses nestling in the hamlets and villages beyond. Stanislas longed to be an artist to depict on paper these simple scenes of Japanese country life, to be capable of immortalising this lovely peaceful nature, chief of which in his eyes were for the present the snowy blooms of the cherry tree, contrasting with the sombre cryptomeria pines, and the brilliant green and red of the giant wild camellia.

But Stanislas, equally ignorant of the kodak as of the paint brush, with a faint sigh of regret continued his tramp alongside the little square fields of the fresh young corn, emerald-green in colour, traversing in his walk many an enchant-

ing silent grove, till at length he reached the goal of his pilgrimage.

Hidden away in the little village of Meguro, and overgrown by vegetation, is a miniature and ancient graveyard. Two grey and battered stones, half fallen on the ground, and half hidden in the long rank grass, is all that is left in this old, old burying ground to mark the last resting place of the dead. Stanislas knew well the pathetic love tale connected with these gravestones, placed there over three hundred years ago, and he paused to examine once again the faint inscription borne by one of them. "The tomb of the Shiyoku," he read, the Shiyoku being, he knew, fabulous birds, emblems of love and fidelity. This moss-grown stone, lying battered and broken before him, told of a love-tale romantic in many of its details, and tragic in its ending. There it had stood for generations, the sole memorial of the burial place of the robber Gompachi, remarkable for his valour and great personal beauty, and of his companion in death, the lovely and loving courtesan, Komurasaki.

The story relates how Gompachi after many murders, was at length caught red-handed and promptly executed, his body being rescued and buried by devoted friends in the grounds of the Temple of Meguro. Komurasaki, getting news of her lover's death, hied to the spot, wept and prayed

long over the tomb, then drawing the dagger—a weapon which in those days every woman wore on her person—from the folds of her "obi,"* she plunged it into her heart, and, sinking on the ground, sighed her last breath over the grave of her beloved.

The legend continues how the priests, touched and greatly struck at the devotion of this beautiful maiden, laid her by the side of her lover, burying them in one grave. There they placed to their memory the stone which remains to this day, and before which incense is burnt, and flowers and offerings are laid, by all true and devoted lovers.

Hard by the gravestone under which so long have mouldered the remains of Gompachi and Komurasaki, is another memorial which appears almost as ancient, on which is engraved the following words which many a time had been read and translated to Stanislas:

"In the old days of Genroku, she pined for the beauty of her lover, who was as fair to look upon as the flowers, and now, beneath the moss of this old tombstone, all has perished of her love but her name. Amid the changes of a fitful world, this tomb is decaying under the dew and the rain, gradually crumbling beneath its own dust, its outline alone remaining. Stranger, bestow an alms to preserve this stone, and we, sparing neither pain

* A sash worn over the dress.

nor labour, will second you with all our hearts. Greeting it again, let us preserve it from decay for future generations, and let us write the following verse upon it :—'These two birds, beautiful as the cherry blossom, perished before their time, like flowers broken down by the wind before they have borne seed.'"

For some time de Güldenfeldt hovered round this romantic spot, musing long on this old-world tale of a love, faithful and lasting even in death. But the time wore on, the shadows lengthened, and half-regretfully he rose, wending his way to the Buddhist Temple of Fudo Sama, a spot that he knew well, buried within a grove of ancient maple trees.

This was a very favourite resort of his. He passed through the *torii* or stone gateway, bounding up the many steps that led to the Shrine, and before which was placed the deep stone-lined basin of water, kept replenished by the ancient bronze fountain carved in the form of a dragon, spouting out from the rock behind.

Stanislas sat himself down by the basin, and lighting a cigarette ruminated on the strange superstition that to this day induces many a weary and penitent pilgrim, winter and summer alike, to stand often for hours at a time under the rushing waterfall. There they would patiently stand, praying fervently that the icy water, in cleansing

and purifying the body would by the intercession of the merciful and all powerful Buddha, thus cleanse and purify the soul within.

De Güldenfeldt lingered for a time beneath the maple and cherry trees, while bright-faced, bright-clothed *nesan*** from the picturesque tea-house hard by, brought him tiny cups of Japanese tea, chattering in their happy childish way, with laughter, smiles and bows. He sat there for over an hour thinking deeply, and when at length the sun, sinking behind the hill, warned him that it was time to go, his resolution was formed.

He would ask Pearl Nugent to be his wife. After all, what was his profession to him compared with his great absorbing love? It was true that hitherto all had been sacrificed to his career, but that was before he had met Pearl, before the love that now filled his heart had taught him what it really was to live and to enjoy. A marriage such as he contemplated would he knew well, be a hindrance to his profession, and, consequently, a severe blow to his ambitions, but for the time being he banished all thought of personal aggrandisement from his mind, and as he rose and once more tramped across the fields, in Stanislas de Güldenfeldt's blue eyes there was a light, and round his firm lips a smile, that had been strangers there for many a long day.

** Waiting maids.

That same day Mrs. Nugent ordered her carriage and drove round to her cousin's house. She made a point of going to see Mrs. Rawlinson whenever she felt restless or discontented, for Rosina acted on her nerves like a stimulant. To-day when she got there Rosina was not at home, but she found her pretty young cousin Amy Mendovy seated by the open window, sketching Fuji-yama with the evening glow upon it.

"Forgive my not getting up, Pearl," the girl said, "but I must finish this before the sun sinks. Have you ever seen Fuji looking more divine? No wonder the Japanese worship the mountain. Just look at it with that hazy, purple light upon it. I have been breaking it gently to Aunt Rosy that I am going to become a Shintoist or a Buddhist, or something."

"Oh, indeed. May I inquire why?"

"So that I may worship Fuji, of course."

"I don't see the connection."

"Oh, don't you? Then you are very dense, my dear. Aren't the Japanese Shintoists or Buddhists? And don't they worship Fuji? Or, if they don't they hold it sacred, which is very much the same thing."

"Don't talk nonsense, Amy. What is the matter with you to-day? You seem so nervous and excited. Why! I declare you have been crying."

No answer, only energetic daubs of green and yellow and carmine, all mixed together on the paper.

"Amy, dear, why have you been crying?" asked Pearl in her soft voice, laying her hand on her cousin's arm.

"Now my dear Pearl, don't be silly; have you ever seen me cry?"

"Yes, often. Tears are as near your eyes as smiles are to your lips, you April day. But tell me, what is wrong?"

"Look here, Pearl," answered Amy, raising her sleek head while her eyes flashed, "I won't be bothered. And if I choose to cry I shall cry, so there."

"Certainly, my dear, and as I came to see Rosina and not you, I have no wish to disturb you in such a profitable occupation. So I'll take my departure. *Addio*," and Pearl turned towards the door.

She hadn't got far, however, before she felt two strong arms round her waist and various energetic kisses upon the back of her neck.

"Come back, Pearl darling. Have some tea and don't be crusty. Why, I have just been longing for you. Aunt Rosy is no good, she doesn't understand me, and never will understand me; so it's no use trying to make her."

"I should like to know who does," said Pearl.

"Well, you do. So I am just going to tell you all about it. Come here and sit on the window-sill. Give me your hand, and let us look at Fuji till the light dies away."

And during a quarter of an hour's silence they watched Fujiyama that rose up dim and indistinct against the setting sun. There it stood in all its solemn majesty, solitary in all its grand reposes superb in all its noble isolation. The dark light, grew fainter and more indistinct, the brilliant blood-red sky with its shifting gleams took paler shades, till little by little it seemed to mingle with the misty colouring of the lonely peak, and behold, even as they watched, night fell, enshrouding all in its vast impenetrable mantle.

"Now, dear," said Pearl, "it's dark, I can hardly see your face, so tell me what is the matter."

Amy rose abruptly and switched on the electric light.

"As to that," she said with a nervous laugh, "pray don't think I am ashamed of being seen. I've done nothing wrong, you know."

"Well, at any rate there's a certain comfort in that affirmation," replied Pearl drily.

"Oh, now you are laughing at me. Never mind, I am accustomed to it." Then, after a pause, "Pearl, he's come back."

"Who's come back?"

"Don't tease. You know whom I mean—Sir Ralph Nicholson, of course."

"Oh, then it was a matter of course that he should come back? Well, continue your confession. He has been here, I suppose?"

"Yes. He told me he returned on purpose to see me, you know. Pearl, he asked me again to be his wife! He was so kind and nice, but he seemed to be so awfully sure that I was going to accept him that I really couldn't help it, but—but—I believe he thinks that I refused him."

"And now you are sorry, I suppose, and have been crying about it. Oh! Amy, Amy! You foolish, foolish girl! Why, you love that man with all your heart. You have never ceased to think of him since he left. And now, when just like in a novel, he turns up again and gives you another chance, you go and throw it away like this. I have no patience with you, Amy, and I don't pity you a bit. You surely ought to understand that Ralph Nicholson is a man in a thousand. A delightful man, a clever man, and, from a worldly point of view, an excellent match. And pray, who are you, Miss, that you should treat him like this? If you didn't care for him it would be another question, but you told me yourself you have never been happy since you said 'no' before. And now—oh! really, I can't tell you what I think, I am so annoyed."

Amy's bright colouring paled while Pearl was speaking. She rose from her seat, and stood with clasped hand and bent head.

"Pearl," she replied, with a break in her voice, "go on—go on scolding me. I feel I deserve every word you say, and you cannot blame me more than I blame myself. I can't think what induced me to behave as I did. But you alone know how sometimes a spirit of contradiction takes possession of me, and when he said, 'I have come back all these thousands of miles to ask you again to be my wife. You will have me this time, won't you, Amy?' I just answered—'And pray, Sir Ralph, why should I answer yes now more than eighteen months ago? The circumstances, I imagine, are just the same as far as I am concerned.'"

"You said that? Good heavens! what cruel creatures women are!" exclaimed Pearl. "And what was his answer?"

"I think he turned very white, and he said —'This, then, is your only answer after—after all this time?'"

"And what did you reply?"

"What did I reply? Oh, nothing."

"Nothing? Oh, Amy!"

"I couldn't, Pearl. But I did the next best thing. I went to the piano and played some bars of a waltz, that waltz of Strauss' to which he and

I have danced so much in the old days. Of course, I thought that he would understand by that—that—well—that I didn't mean 'no' exactly. A woman would have understood the *nuance* in a second, but men are so dense. I put plenty of expression into my playing, too. But when I looked up he was gone!"

Pearl couldn't help laughing at this very original form of replying to an offer of marriage. She took the girl in her arms and kissed her.

"Really, Amy, you are a most extraordinary girl. What other person would think of doing such a thing? You really deserve that he should never come back again. A serious man like Sir Ralph is not to be coquetted with like a boy. He put you a question, a question on which depends the happiness of his life, and all you seem capable of doing is to reply in this flippant manner."

"Don't you think I see all that clearly enough now?" replied Amy mournfully, "and what is worse, there is a mail going out to-morrow—the 'China,' and I'm convinced he'll sail by it. Oh, Pearl! do help me. What am I to do? I can't let him go away again. I really can't."

"Now look here, Amy, if I come to the rescue in this matter—which is far more than you deserve, Miss—will you promise to be guided by me?"

"Well, you know, Pearl," replied Amy, with a

mischievous light in her eyes, "I hate making promises, for I no sooner make one than I find *c'est plus fort que moi*, and lo! it is broken. But in this case my own interests are so much at stake that perhaps—perhaps—"

Pearl rose from her seat and began putting on her cloak.

"Oh, Amy, Amy! why will you not be more like other people? You give most people, dear, such an entirely false impression of your real nature. But never mind, I am not going to preach any more to-day. Good-bye! and if Sir Ralph ever has the temerity to ask you again, try and behave for once in your life like a rational being."

Pearl's thoughts were much occupied with Miss Mendovy as she drove home that afternoon. She was extremely attached to her young cousin, and perhaps she sympathised better than most people with the contradictions of that girlish nature.

Amy Mendovy, the only child of a sister of Mrs. Rawlinson's, was left an orphan while still an infant. Rosina adopted her, in every way fulfilling the mother's part. She loved the girl with all her heart. But in spite of her great affection and indeed, genuine admiration, she did not profess in the smallest degree to understand her. Consequently their ideas, habits, and ways of

looking at things generally, were hardly what could be called congenial or sympathetic.

Mrs. Rawlinson was a simple-minded creature, and deluded herself with the belief that she was now extremely modern and up-to-date. If the truth were known, she had never entirely recovered from the narrow, Calvinistic training of her youth, a proof of which was particularly shown in the prim, little manner she affected when she thought it necessary to correct her niece. Amy delighted in rousing that manner, indeed, at times her chief joy in life appeared to be that of teasing her aunt. It was only when she had succeeded in finally driving the poor soul to the verge of desperation that she would throw her arms around her neck, coax her, blame herself, ask pardon—in fact, behave generally in such a bewitching *caline* way, that it would indeed be a stony heart that could resist her, and certainly not the soft organ that Rosina Rawlinson was generally credited with possessing.

Pearl as she drove home, was thinking of this strain of perversity in her cousin's disposition. She confessed to herself that it added greatly to her charm, but nevertheless she deeply regretted this peculiarity, preferring to dwell on those deeper traits in the girl's character which to others were so seldom visible. Under the apparently frivolous, somewhat futile manner, there was a

strength, almost a grandeur of soul, the glimpses of which more than once had literally taken away Pearl's breath, so totally had she been unprepared for such an exhibition. It was strange to hear some deep thought expressed by those lips, that seemed formed only for mockery and laughter, and still stranger to see the flash of cold disdain, of righteous scorn, that would fill the dark eyes at the sight of some mean or unworthy action, or at the sound of some paltry, petty speech.

But it was only to very few that the beautiful Miss Mendovy ever showed this finer side of her nature, and to the world at large she was looked upon as a girl of moods—original and impetuous—lovely as a dream, and as heartless as a stone.

CHAPTER III.

Pains and Penalties.

Sir Ralph Nicholson appeared the next day at Pearl's house in answer to a note he had found awaiting him on his return from dining at the Swedish Legation the evening before. Stanislas de Güldenfeldt and he were old and intimate friends, yet in spite of the fact that he was feeling bitterly mortified at Miss Mendovy's cool reception, not once did Amy's name cross his lips in the conversation kept up between the two men until the early hours of the morning.

De Güldenfeldt, on the contrary, spoke incessantly of Pearl, and Ralph wondered if his friend had the vaguest idea how much he betrayed himself in every word he let fall. He gazed at him with amazement. Here was a man who had been known throughout his career as the most cautious, the most guarded, and the most reticent of diplomatists, proving by every remark that passed his lips, in the very expression of his flushed and handsome face, the thoughts that were evidently entirely monopolising his mind. For the time

being the two men seemed to have changed personalities, and the more de Güldenfeldt spoke of Pearl, the more silent and reserved did Nicholson become. He watched him with half-closed eyes through his cigar smoke, and with a cynicism he had somewhat adopted of late, found himself pitying what he chose to designate as his friend's "state of demoralisation."

"Poor old fellow," he thought, "Japan is spoiling him. Three years ago one would never have heard him maudling about a woman in this ridiculous way. Good Heavens! what confounded fools these women make of us!"

To Mrs. Nugent the following day he gave expression to almost the same sentiment, though on that occasion it was entirely in reference to himself. To her he was as frank and open as he had been reticent to de Güldenfeldt. Little by little the whole story came out. How it was not the charm of the scenery of Japan, not its people so clever, brave and fascinating, not its engrossing art, much as he appreciated beautiful things, in fact none of these attractions that had recalled him to the country after a few months absence, but simply the recollection of one little rebellious curl on Amy Mendovy's white forehead, the distinct and haunting impression of a seductively mocking expression in the bright eyes that had induced him to cast all home duties and plea-

sures to the winds, and had once more dragged him back to her side.

"And you see, Mrs. Nugent, how I have been rewarded for my constancy. But then men are such confounded fools! She refused me eighteen months ago, you know. Nevertheless I always had a faint hope that *au fond* she was not so entirely indifferent to me, which proves what a conceited, fatuous ass I am. Perhaps it is only fair that I should be punished for my folly."

"And are you so very positive that she does not care for you?" asked Pearl, looking up into his face with a smile.

"Judge for yourself. If a girl cared two straws for a man, would she in response to an offer of marriage, after a journey of eleven thousand miles taken by that unfortunate fellow for her sake, sit down and begin to strum on the piano? I ask you, would any girl with a scrap of feeling or of heart do such an outrageous thing?"

"What did she play?"

"How am I to know? And I'm sure I don't care. I have no ear for music. Something very noisy and jingly, that's all I heard."

"You didn't recognise the waltz you used to dance together, then?" and Pearl, without looking at him, began putting straight the little ivory *netsuke** on her mantelpiece.

* Carved objects that attach the tobacco pouch.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Ralph, jumping from his seat, "you don't mean to tell me she was playing *that!* Now you mention it, the tune did seem familiar to me. You mean, then, that—Good Heavens! I see it all now. Mrs. Nugent, what an infernal idiot I have been!"

"Yes," said Pearl quietly, "perhaps you have been rather a goose."

"But how the dickens was I to know? Who would ever have imagined she would act in such an extraordinary way?"

"In all your dealings with that young woman you must bear in mind that she never does things quite like other people," replied Pearl. "That must always be taken into consideration, and your own conduct consequently must be dependent on this knowledge. So, instead of rushing off to her instantly again, as I see you are dying to do, I should refrain if I were you."

"But what am I to do?"

"I should simply for a time take absolutely no notice of her, and what would be better still, and would certainly lead to most excellent results, get up a mild flirtation with someone else."

Sir Ralph looked serious. "Mrs. Nugent," he said, "I am not a bit that sort of fellow, you know. I'm really an awful duffer at saying pretty things to a woman, especially when I don't mean them."

"Never mind, try your best for once in a way. For take my word for it, if you want Amy as a wife, you must first rouse her *pique*, her jealousy. She feels far too sure of you now, and she will be surer still if she finds you have no intention of going off again—as she now half fears you may do. If I were you, and if really you care to be guided by me, I should advise you to choose a married woman for your flirtation, a woman who would be sensible enough not to take too much *au grand serieux* any nonsense you may talk."

Sir Ralph Nicholson thrust his hands down into his pockets and walked to the window. He stood gazing for some moments out on to the cherry trees shining like pale pink snow in the brilliant sunshine. Then he turned suddenly round and faced Pearl.

"Mrs. Nugent," he said, "I have something on my mind which I must tell you. May I?"

"Certainly," replied Pearl quietly, "I am accustomed to receiving confidences. What is it?"

"Oh, it is not a confidence. It is something about—about you—this time. At least I mean not about you, but about—Martinworth."

Pearl rose from her seat, and going up to Ralph clutched nervously at his sleeve.

"What is it?" she asked breathlessly, while she turned very pale. "Is—is he dead?"

"Dead! Good Heavens! No. He was in the

most flourishing state of health when I saw him last in Paris, but he has nevertheless dished himself pretty considerably. He is—he is—you must know sooner or later—he is—married, and—and—what's more, he is coming out here."

"He is married and he is coming out here!" Pearl echoed the words in a dull voice as she stared into Sir Ralph's sympathetic face. "Dick married and coming out here with his wife! Good God! what shall I do?" and she remained motionless with her distressed eyes fixed on Nicholson.

"My dear Mrs. Nugent—my dear lady," blundered Ralph, "please don't look like that. For God's sake, I implore you to sit down! Say—do—something. I wish I hadn't told you. But I thought it best, for of course, you are bound to meet them if they come here. So I thought—I thought you had better be prepared. But confound it all! I would have risked anything rather than that you should have taken it so badly."

This last phrase roused Pearl from the dismay and stupefaction experienced on first hearing Nicholson's unexpected news. She managed to smile while she nervously put her hand to her forehead and pushed back the curls of her hair. After all, who was Sir Ralph that she should betray herself like this? A friend, it is true; a

valued friend who knew her history; but that was no reason why he should also become acquainted with her heart. With an effort that cost her much she was successful in recovering a certain amount of control over her features. She sat down with her back to the light, and, taking a book from a table, began turning over the leaves.

"Your news naturally interests me much," she said in a voice that she succeeded in rendering almost indifferent. "Of course, at first it took me by surprise. I—I'm sure I don't know why—but I—I—never thought Lord Martinworth would marry. Whom—whom has he? Sir Ralph, would you mind telling me if his wife is anyone I know? Whom has he married?"

Alas! for Pearl's reputation for imperturbability, these last questions were asked in a very low, a very unsteady voice.

"Oh yes, you know her. You must have seen her knocking about Town for a dozen seasons at least. He has married that extraordinary type: his cousin, Lady Harriet Joyce; the large, fair one, who generally goes by the name of 'Harry'"——

"Harry Joyce! Oh yes, I remember her," said Pearl quietly.

"She has run him down at last. She and her people have been trying it on for years, you know."

Pearl did not reply. When she next spoke it was excessively calmly, on a totally different subject.

But oh, the bitterness of it all! She sat and thought it all over when Sir Ralph had left her. So Martinworth had forgotten her so soon—so soon! And yet, she thought, ought she to blame him? Ought she not, instead of feeling this sentiment of utter despondency, utter disgust, be rejoicing that Martinworth by this step could henceforth no longer be anything nearer to her than an ordinary friend, an ordinary acquaintance? She accused herself over and over again for her inconsistency. She told herself that she was absurd, illogical, unreasonable. Had she not fled from this man—hidden herself from him—for the express purpose that he should forget her? Had she not advised him to marry some woman who could show an honest front to the world, and be a credit to him? And now that apparently after some delay he had obeyed her injunctions, what right had she to complain, to regret, to feel angry and bitter, and to cavil against the inconstancy of man?

Pearl's thoughts turned before long from herself and Martinworth to the girl he had married. At last she experienced the satisfaction of being able to give full vent to her anger and disappointment. To think that it was *she*—that it was Harry Joyce

whom he had chosen as his wife out of all the women of his world! That elderly young lady whose whole soul was wrapped up in guns and horses, in motor cars and rational costumes. Harry Joyce, who never opened a book, and whose newspaper and magazine reading was confined to the racing calendar and to the sporting journals. Harry of the strident voice and weather-beaten countenance, whose ordinary way of greeting her intimates of the opposite sex was to call them by their nick-names, and to slap them on the back. A woman who disregarded all the ordinary usages of society, every outward form of conventionalism, and yet, because she was the only daughter of a Duke, was not only time after time forgiven, but what was more, was accepted as a matter of course, and in her frequent eccentricities was never at a loss to find in either sex both followers and admirers.

"Perhaps she has improved now, but she used to be a horrible girl," exclaimed Pearl aloud, and rising from her chair she paced up and down the room. "Dick always told me he detested her, and was ashamed to acknowledge her as his cousin, And to think of his committing the enormity of marrying such a woman. He must be mad! They haven't got a single idea in common. In old days he cordially hated the emancipated female. Some men of course find that sort of

thing amusing. I have heard her called more than once 'A capital fellow,' but imagine Dick, my Dick, with such a wife! Imagine Dick uniting his lot with 'A capital fellow!' Every word she will utter, every action, every gesture, will grate on his nerves—will horrify and disgust him. Oh, what could have possessed him to ruin his life by such an outrageous marriage?"

For many days did Pearl ponder over this problem, till at last she arrived at what was perhaps more or less the right solution. Would she have been human if, having decided in her own mind the reason for this marriage, she did not at the bottom of her heart feel a sneaking satisfaction that the wife he had taken was after all the masculine and unattractive Lady Harriet Joyce, and not the sweet and innocent and beautiful maid whom she herself had prescribed?

Nevertheless, in spite of any slight comfort she may have succeeded in deriving from this thought, poor Pearl felt very sore and very forlorn, and when a few days later Monsieur de Güldenfeldt offered her his hand and his heart, she was more than half inclined to yield to the temptation of accepting a man who in positive terms assured her of his love, and who could give her not only a much-to-be-desired, but what was more, a safe and tangible position.

Stanislas had, on the occasion referred to, accom-

panied her in her ride, and they had stopped at a little tea-house to rest themselves and their horses. They wandered off on foot through a grove of bamboos, and the conversation turning on Ralph Nicholson's unexpected return to the country, Pearl found herself speaking with considerable feeling, of his constancy to her erratic young cousin.

"Nevertheless I have given him a piece of very worldly and very wicked advice," she said with her pretty laugh—"I told him to get up a mild flirtation with a married woman."

"Why married?" asked de Güldenfeldt.

"Because if he has no serious intentions, what's the good of compromising a girl? Girls fall in love so easily; whereas married women," she added with a sigh, "know so well how to look after themselves."

Monsieur de Güldenfeldt did not reply for a moment. Then he stopped in his walk, and gazing at his companion, asked somewhat gravely:

"Mrs. Nugent, are you quite sure that all married women know so very well how to take care of themselves?"

"I think," answered Pearl in a low voice, "if, as I judge from your question you are thinking of me, I really know pretty well how to look out for myself. But then, of course my position is

different from the majority of married women. I am a sort of anomaly, and have had the sad necessity of learning the lesson how to protect my poor battered self. I confess, at times I have found it a somewhat difficult task. But I feel sure I have mastered it thoroughly now. It has been a case of *force majeure*, you see." And tears glistened in her eyes as she looked up at him.

Stanislas de Güldenfeldt's heart swelled as, glancing at this beautiful woman with the troubled face, he thought of the unhappiness of her past life, and of her present dignity and courage. He stopped again, and seized hold of her hands.

"Mrs. Nugent—Pearl," he said in a deep voice, "instead of for the future fighting your own battles, dear, will you let me fight them for you? Will you marry me? Will you let me have the gratification of being in the blessed position of having the right to protect you? Of shielding you from evil tongues, and of trying to render you the happy woman you deserve to be?"

The colour flew into Pearl's cheeks, but she did not withdraw her hands from his. She looked at him, extreme astonishment depicted on her face.

"You are asking me to marry you?" she said, "you—you——?"

"Yes—I love you deeply, and my greatest desire on earth is to make you my wife. Why

should you be so surprised at that? Why, Pearl?"

For a minute Pearl looked down into the blue eyes that, full of tenderness, were resting on her face. She gazed at them as if trying to penetrate their very depths. They were kind, true eyes, she thought; but she withdrew her hands gently from his, and turned away with a sigh.

"No," she said, "I can never marry you. Oh! that I could—that I could! Do you know," she added hastily, without waiting for the reply that she saw trembling on his lips, "do you know, Monsieur de Güldenfeldt, that I think you one of the best, one of the most generous of men. You are offering me everything. I, who can give so little—nothing in return."

"I ask you for much: for your love, Pearl. Will you not give it to me, dear?"

Pearl did not reply. Her thoughts travelled as fast as the clouds above her. Why after all should she not accept him? It was a brilliant offer; an offer that a woman placed as she was, placed could never in her wildest dreams have thought probable, or even possible. By marrying de Güldenfeldt she was perfectly aware that her position in society, which now hung on so delicate a thread, would become regular and secure. He knew her story. She had no inconvenient confessions to make. He was evidently willing

to take the risk of all future possible contingencies, and of his love and tenderness and regard she felt no doubt. Lord Martinworth would come and would find her engaged, or married ; and for one brief moment Pearl experienced a glow of satisfaction at the thought that her former lover on his arrival, would find her, not pining or regretting, not angry or dismayed, but in the proud position of a happy and a triumphant wife. But this thought was instantly crushed as unworthy. She blushed to think she had ever entertained it, and she told herself that the natural grief, or *pique*, or whatever it was she felt in connection with Lord Martinworth's marriage, must have no influence on her present decision—must, in no way whatsoever, affect that answer which she knew she must give within the next few minutes.

De Güldenfeldt was, she was well aware, a clever and a good man ; a man of a certain present and of a brilliant future ; a man that any woman might be proud to call husband; and here he stood, offering her—a poor waif and stray in society—his love and his name. And yet she felt that it was beyond her to accept these gifts offered thus generously. Why ? she hardly asked herself. Was it because she still loved Martinworth ?—Perhaps—she could not tell. But of one thing she felt convinced, she did not love,

could never love, Stanislas de Güldenfeldt. She admired and respected and liked him more than she admired or liked most men. She delighted in his society and in his conversation, which was full of piquant anecdote, intellect and charm. She felt absolutely contented, thoroughly at ease in his companionship, which acted as a stimulant in her otherwise somewhat monotonous life. She did not disguise from herself for a moment the many advantages she was renouncing in setting aside this offer, and yet Pearl felt that it was absolutely impossible for her to accept him, for if she did she would she knew, be true neither to de Güldenfeldt, whom she liked so well, nor, above all, true to herself.

By this time the two were seated on a little bamboo bench, and de Güldenfeldt, waiting and watching with anxiety the expressive face, half guessed and wholly feared the struggle that was being fought within. He rose hurriedly.

"Don't say anything, don't speak now," he exclaimed, "Wait, Pearl. Take your time to consider, but remember, my darling—I may call you so this once?—that my whole life's future, my whole life's happiness, depends on your answer."

Pearl felt greatly tempted to abide by this advice and to delay. As he gave her this chance, why commit herself by answering at once? But her hesitation lasted only a minute. Her natural

candour and frankness of disposition warned her it would be more than cowardly to postpone her refusal. She turned towards him and said in her low voice:

"Monsieur de Güldenfeldt, it is best you should know at once that which always must be known, for I know my decision can never change. I fear it is—it must be—'No.' I can never marry you. For your own sake it must be so, for I do not love you as you should—as you deserve to be loved. My liking, my respect, my admiration is unbounded, but love—forgive me for paining you—such as I have known the word, is not, can never be mine to give you."

De Guldenfeldt let his keen blue eyes rest for a minute on Pearl's flushed face, then without a single word in reply—with a quick, impatient shrug of the shoulders—without a moment's hesitation he turned and strode abruptly away.

Left by herself on the bench, Mrs. Nugent watched this precipitate departure with considerable dismay. She had seen and known the Swedish Minister in many moods. Ironical, pensive, bubbling over with good spirits one day, melancholy and depressed the next, but, so far, she never remembered having been a witness to his anger. She gazed after him now with genuine consternation, as he paced the little path with his head thrown back, and his hands thrust well

down into the pockets of his riding breeches. Her spirits sank as the minutes passed, and he finally disappeared from view. Eventually the sentiment of trepidation that had at first seized her changed to that of irritation and considerable annoyance. After all, she thought, she had answered him as gently as surely, in the circumstances, it was possible to reply, and the more she considered the question, the more did a feeling of extreme vexation and surprise overcome her at her refusal being received in this apparently intensely angry and rebellious spirit.

Women at best are but unreasonable creatures, and Mrs. Nugent was no exception to the rule, forgetting to make allowances for the necessary blow that such a prompt refusal must certainly inflict on a man of Stanislas de Güldenfeldt's proud and rather unyielding disposition. On his side he was fully aware of the many and great advantages of his offer, and of the sacrifices on his part that such a marriage would entail. It had by no means been fear of failure alone that had prevented him from suggesting a connection of a possibly too unbinding or temporary nature. Since his final determination to make this marriage, he had learnt that the great love he bore Pearl would in itself, independent of any other reason, be sufficient to cause him to reject the former idea with promptitude and distaste.

He did not however, disguise from himself that, situated as she was, nine men out of ten would have hesitated before offering her their name. He himself had deliberated and paused before taking this step, but having once, with complete disregard of his future, proposed to give up all for her, he found it impossible to recover from the mortification that her abrupt rejection of his offer, and the refusal for one moment even to consider his proposal, had caused him.

Stanislas, greatly angered and deep in thought, strode on and on. It was only the fact of unexpectedly finding himself once more at the tea-house that roused him from his vexatious thoughts, recalling to him the fact of his hasty departure, and unceremonious desertion of Pearl.

He then and there retraced his steps, and found her where he had left her on the bench, with a heightened colour, and a look of decided reproach in her eyes. He was very pale as he lifted his hat to her.

"Pardon me for leaving you alone," he merely said. "Shall we return now. It is getting chilly."

Pearl rose without a word. She followed humbly, feeling somewhat like a naughty child in disgrace. It was not long before her pride rebelled against this sentiment, so unpleasantly novel to her, and though her voice trembled,

and her throat felt rough and dry, she nerved herself to break the prolonged and awkward silence.

"I don't think you are treating me very well," she said rather defiantly. "You did me the honour to ask me a question, and I replied in the only way that seemed possible to me. I can only say I grieve if it was not the answer you appear evidently to have expected."

Monsieur de Güldenfeldt did not speak. He merely slowly raised his head, and with his searching eyes gave Pearl one long and steadfast look. This look had the unpleasant effect of causing Mrs. Nugent to sincerely wish she had bitten her tongue out sooner than have ventured to break the silence.

CHAPTER IV.

Deep Waters.

Stanislas fled from Tokyo. He felt as if he hated the place, as if he never wished to set foot in it again. The evening of the day that Pearl refused him he wrote to his Government requesting leave to return home, but he worked almost single-handed at his Legation, and he knew that it would be impossible to take his departure until someone had been sent out to relieve him, a circumstance which meant many months of weary waiting.

What might happen during those months he found himself wondering, as he read over the letter he had written so impetuously? A day, a week might alter the whole chain of events, and by the time his Government had given him permission to take advantage of his leave, making all arrangements to facilitate his departure, he knew that it was more than possible that the idea of throwing up his work and of leaving Japan would be the last desire prominent in his mind.

Even in moments of the greatest excitement or of distress, Stanislas—where the question of his

work was in any way involved—rarely acted hastily or without looking at the question from all sides. Thus in the present case, though it would have been impossible for him to have explained the exact reason why, after weighty consideration, he ended by thrusting the hastily written letter into a drawer, where it reposed peacefully until destroyed many months later.

Not that at this moment De Güldenfeldt for one second contemplated asking Mrs. Nugent a second time to become his wife. No thought, indeed, was further from his mind. After much quiet deliberation, indeed considerable hesitation, he had brought himself to the point of making this offer, and greatly to his surprise, disappointment, and distress, he had been refused. He was deeply in love with Pearl, but it must be confessed the sentiment for the moment that had the greatest hold on the spirit of Stanislas de Güldenfeldt, swamping all other feelings,—even for the time being that of his love—was that of wounded pride, Stanislas was by no means perfect, his faults were many and manifold, and like all those who from their earliest youth have acted as their own masters—seldom having been crossed in either whims or desires—he was extraordinarily intolerant, even in small matters, of the slightest contradiction or hindrance to his wishes. But when it came to the point of re-

nouncing what he most desired in life, not only for the moment, but he knew well for all futurity, Stanislas was consumed with what was far more than a merely temporary sentiment of annoyance and distress. A great astonishment, a permanent anger and resentment filled his whole being, and his one thought at the present moment was to fly from Pearl and all associations of her, striving his utmost to entirely banish from his mind the woman who had so strangely upset his equanimity, disarranging so completely his rather settled habits and whole system of life.

Thus it was, travelling by slow stages and passing his nights at clean and picturesque tea-houses sleeping on *futon** and eating the food of the country, Stanislas, and the young interpreter of his Legation, Suzuki, his sole companion in his travels, one day found themselves at Sendai, from which place they took the train to Shiogama. There a *sampan*—the flat bottomed junk of the Japanese—was engaged, and for several hours Stanislas, stretched at the bottom of the boat, with hands clasped behind his head, and eyes gazing lazily up unto the unclouded sky above, glided in and out through the thousands of lovely islands of this archipelago, so full of mystery and of dreams. Weird and wonderful were those islands, bays, and promontories, in some cases beautiful and en-

*Japanese quilts.

trancing in their wealth of thick grown pines and rich and varied vegetation, and in others, almost uncanny in their bare, naked, volcanic rocks, worn into strange patterns and fantastic shapes by the inroads of the ever surging sea. Under the late afternoon sun, and across this lovely limpid sea of green, would fade far away in the distance vast and misty ranges of thickly wooded hills, while here and there, gleaming through the soft whiteness of the light, a great peak of purple would arise aloft like a beckoning finger, reaching far beyond into the fast flying clouds of the faintly shaded sky.

On reaching Matsushima (the "Island of the Pines") after this never-to-be-forgotten sail of some delicious hours, and on arriving at the tea-house perched on a rock high above the water, that was to be his shelter for the night, de Güldenfeldt, while the evening meal was being prepared under the supervision of Suzuki, leaned idly over the little barrier of the verandah. He leant and gazed wonderingly at the beautiful scene, till his whole soul was pervaded by the gentleness, the dreamy passionlessness, the immense repose of the solemn charm of the sight before him. The musically rippling water, the many thousand islands, the fading sun-set, with its great shafts of glowing colour shooting across the sky, and merging mysteriously into soft and subtle twilight—all

had a peculiar beauty and character of their own. It seemed to him like nothing he had ever seen before. No old recollections, no old memories were stirred to life as his eyes wandered over the waters, and dwelt on the many thousand islands of every form and size, now growing shapeless and dim in the darkening shadows of the night.

And as he gazed thus, drinking in the beauty of the scene and thinking of nothing—not even for one moment of Pearl—and as the short twilight gradually faded and night fell, Stanislas was the witness of a strange and picturesque sight.

Thousands and thousands of dazzling lights were shimmering on the surface of the dark calm sea before him, each light growing gradually fainter and fainter, and gliding further and further away into the open. Then it was that de Güldenfeldt remembered that it was the sacred and yearly ceremony of the "Shoryobune," or the launching of the Ships of the Souls, when thousands of little skiffs and barks, each illuminated with a single lantern, are once a year set afloat upon the open sea by the simple fisher-folk. On this date the ocean is nought for the time being but one vast highway of the Dead, whose passing souls must cross the waters, be they rough or calm, to eventually reach the haven of their distant and Eternal Home.

Now gleaming on the crest of the wave, now

disappearing beneath the waters, those fires of the Dead take their onward uncertain journey. Sad indeed, is the fate of the lost lamenting soul, whose little craft with its twinkling light is submerged and extinguished by the scudding spray of the sea, disappearing for ever from all human sight and ken. For that poor struggling spirit is no rest, nor eternal repose, forever and forever will it be an outcast and a wanderer, hovering on the shores of that Land in which Nirvâna is found, but fated never to dwell within the regions of its blessed calm and peace.

It is said that as these ghostly lights take their strange and onward journey across the sea, the distant murmur of many voices is heard like the mournful roar of the surf beating on the strand, the language uncomprehended and indistinguishable of those many thousand weary souls, struggling on towards their long prayed-for, long-expected haven of peace and holy contemplation.

And as de Güldenfeldt gazed out thus far before him, his eye became fixed upon one little glimmer, dancing up and down on the water, and a cry above the murmur of the many voices seemed to him to come from the direction of that light. Stanislas could not tear his eyes away from this distant gleam, nor shut his ears to the sound of that cry, so faint and weak, and yet so strangely dominant over all other sounds around him. And

as he looked, fascinated and engrossed, the fancy seized him that it was even at the spectacle of his own striving weary soul he was gazing, and that the wail that proceeded from that flickering light, rising and falling across the waters, was the echo of the cry of desolation and despair that had filled and rent his heart, ever since the day he had parted from Pearl Nugent in anger and bitter disillusion. He leant further over the balcony, trying to pierce the gloom and to follow the wind-fraught vagaries of that one faint glimmering light. Now it tore swiftly along, now it rose high above the waves, seeming to challenge with its swift and triumphant haste the more backward competitors in this strenuous race, of which the distant goal was the stormy and open sea.

It disappeared for the space of an instant, and dreading that it was engulfed for ever by the waters, Stanislas' heart sank within him. Ah! no! there it was again, solitary and triumphant, shining like a colossal diamond, far, far away—as far as eye could see. Alone it was, reaching a great distance beyond the others, and de Güldenfeldt felt grieved for this flickering uncertain light, always solitary, always struggling, however much it was in advance, or appeared to have vanquished those who had first started with it in the race.

It was, therefore, with a certain glow of joy, a

sentiment of excitement, which he made no effort to suppress, that he finally perceived another distant light, yet as luminous and as steady as the first, flying with all speed over the suddenly roughening ocean, every instant approaching nearer to the brilliant spark that for so long had remained triumphantly mistress of the seas. Stanislas, without hesitation, joyously decided in his own mind that this second light could be none other than the soul-light of Pearl, for as it gained on the distant gleam the faint piteous cry that had hitherto proceeded from the latter ceased, and the light stood still on the face of the waters, and Stanislas knew that his own expectant spirit was waiting for Pearl's soul to join it. Swifter and swifter it flew, nearer and nearer it came, gaining every moment on that other trembling light that was pausing on the crest of the wave to bear it company on that rough and onward journey. Stanislas felt assured that just one faint effort more, one short critical moment, would join in happy and eternal union these two distant lights. But as he gazed breathlessly, the light which he called Pearl's soul, for one brief second gleamed up high into the horizon, gave a faint wavering flicker, and the surface that an instant before was all aglow with its vaporous brilliancy, grew as dark as the inky night that so suddenly seemed to envelope all things, and the little spark, en-

gulfed by the waters, vanished for ever from all human sight!

And there still remained his light, his soul, solitary and forlorn, drifting aimlessly on and on. Once again Stanislas caught the sound from far across the waters of that moaning cry, that piteous faint lament, the echo of the desolation in his own heart; and the wail rang in his ears till the light on the sea, growing smaller and smaller, and fainter and fainter, finally merged into the distant horizon, and was seen no more.

"I wonder what is coming to me," sighed de Güldenfeldt, as reluctantly stirring from the balcony, he sat himself down on the pile of cushions prepared for him on the *tatami*,* "I am as sentimental, as great a fool as any boy indulging in his first attack of calf-love. Yet—and yet—I wish to God Pearl's light had not gone out, but had succeeded in eventually reaching mine. It would somehow have seemed more reassuring, a better omen for the future, whereas now——"

Stanislas de Güldenfeldt passed a bad night. The tea-house, famous for its lovely and extensive view, but for little else, was by no means the haven of rest he had hoped for. The celebration of a *Geisha* feast in the next room, with all its accompaniments of cheerful voices, rippling laughter, and the doubtful charms of the music

*Japanese mats.

of the *samisen*,* destroyed through the earlier hours of the night all thoughts of repose. When at length the last convivial guest, after many *O'yasumi nasai*,† had finally taken his departure, Stanislas found to his cost that his *futon* were both hard and lumpy, and that the Japanese green mosquito net, perforated with holes, seemed expressly fabricated to admit scores of those wily and vicious insects, with which his tussles were many and necessarily totally unsuccessful. He tossed and turned, dozed for a few minutes, and in his uneasy dreams was haunted by the soul-lights. Now dancing on the waves, now taking weird shapes of grotesque birds of prey, or fish and animals of no known description, they seemed to imperiously beckon him to join them, or enveloping him in strange uncanny arms, they dragged his struggling form far beneath the waters. Finally he no longer could support in patience the discomfort of his room or these weird nightmares of an excited brain, and rising from his lowly couch and pushing open the *amado*,‡ he looked out into the night.

The moon was full, illuminating with its bright glory the calm sea from which all the lights had long since vanished, and from the surface of

* A musical instrument like a guitar in form.

† Good-nights.

‡ Wooden sliding shutters.

which the islands rose from out the water like great gaps blackened by mysterious and ever-moving shadows. On the right, partly hidden by its sacred groves, approached by the red *torii** resting almost on the water's edge, stood bathed in the mystic light, the ancient and picturesque shrine. This lovely little shrine was entirely framed by one immense cedar, whose great branches, motionless in the silent night air, stretched far beyond, like dark angels guarding the consecrated ground. Not a living creature was to be seen, and with the exception of the hum of the night insects, all was as silent as the aged moss-grown tombstones on which the moon-beams fell in ghostly streaks of light.

"Oh, Heavenly Orb! whose pale but magic light,
Sheds liquid glory through the realms of night.
Oh, pathless wanderer! whose holy gleam
Enshrines the Heavens around with silv'ry beam.
Dear to my longing heart thy wondrous ray,
Kindling pure thoughts that shun the glaring day
Here while I pensive kneel, gazing above,
Thy silver sheen melts wild thoughts into love;
And radiant dreams, and hopes and fancies roll
In 'wild'ring rapture through my restless soul.
Shine on, mild, mystic Moon! aid tears to cease,
Through my sad heart shed thy calm light of Peace."

This simple verse was the composition of the English mother he had adored, and the repetition of it, so appropriate to the sweet scene before Stanislas' eyes, tended greatly towards bestowing

* The gateway leading to a temple.

that repose which till now had eluded his weary yet restless mind.

But the beauty and peace and silence were not to last. A shadow fell across the surface of the moon, and a fitful and mysterious wind wailed from behind the hills. Suddenly, with no previous warning, every cur in every little hamlet from far and near commenced a discordant and incessant barking. Before Stanislas could ask himself what meant this unwelcomed disturbance of the calm night, a premonitory trembling of the wooden verandah on which he stood warned him that all the terrors of an earthquake were before him. There was no time to realise this disagreeable fact before another shock followed the first, more violent and more prolonged, then a third, in which the wood creaking, rose like the waves of the ocean from beneath his feet. Stanislas found himself clinging to the bamboo rails of the verandah, watching with a strange fascination the branches of the sacred cedar waving violently backwards and forwards as if shaken by the force of a tempest, and the red *torii* beyond, trembling in its balance. The shock continued, each second increasing the violence thereof, till, with a deafening roar, like the roar of the ocean, with one stupendous and prolonged crash, the frail building, sliding from its slight foundations, collapsed like a house of cards! Stanislas remembered

no more until he found himself stretched on the ground outside all that now remained of the once picturesque tea-house. A few yards further and he would have been over the cliff. As it was, he was on his feet in a moment, feeling none the worse for his fall, which had been from no great height, and was broken by the heap of stones and rubbish on which he fell.

The house was a mass of ruins. Such indeed, as soon as his somewhat dazed condition allowed him to look around him, seemed to be the melancholy condition of most of the miniature match-box habitations that three minutes before had stood edging the sea in all their simple and romantic beauty. The *torii* that he had admired so short a time ago bathed in the calm moonlight now lay prone on the ground, while half the roof of the little shirne had vanished in a cloud of dust. Only remained the great and ancient cedar to compete against and triumphantly conquer many another revolution of angry nature. This noble tree had survived hundreds of years of earth oscillations and currents, tidal waves and earthquakes, volcanic agencies to which we are told Japan itself owes her very being. Doubtless to the same terrible and disastrous causes, perhaps to-day, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps only in the far distant ages to come, will this beautiful fairyland owe her ultimate destruction.

Güldenfeldt's first thought in the chaos that followed was of his young interpreter Suzuki. He shouted his name aloud, but in the din and confusion and the chorus of wails and weepings over lost property—and, alas! in many cases, lost dear ones—his voice was unheard. He knew the boy had been sleeping in the room next to his own, but that little room was now with the rest of the building, heaped on the ground a mass of ruins. Calling on some of the fishermen who were standing by him stupefied by the scene of bitter desolation before them—he tore wildly at the *débris* of planks and paper and matting piled on the ground, feeling sure that he had but to persevere long enough to find him for whom he searched. In far too short a space of time in lifting a heavy beam of wood, the body of this dear companion of his travels was discovered beneath, motionless and dead. From the first indeed, a presentiment of coming evil had warned Stanislas he would thus find him. The moon, once more unclouded and brilliant, lit up the boy's good-looking face and slim young form. Still resting on his *futon* there was an expression of such complete peace and happiness on his countenance that for a moment it was indeed difficult not to consider as merely slumbering, this youth hurled thus suddenly into eternity.

De Güldenfeldt raised the burden, so light and

delicate in his arms, and pushing away the dark hair from the brow he perceived a deep jagged cut on the temple. That wound in itself was enough to cause instant death. The blood had ceased to flow with the ceasing of the heart-throbs, and as his eyes lingered sadly on the inanimate form within his arm, the tears welled up into de Güldenfeldt's eyes. He had loved this young man born at the Legation, and educated at the French school, the worthy son of a noble Samurai, who himself after the Revolution and on the loss of his fortune, had in years gone-by, been only too grateful to accept the situation of Interpreter at the Swedish Legation. From the first day that Stanislas had held the post of Minister in Japan, this youth, unusually quick and intelligent, had proved not only his companion, but his right hand. He had returned the affection of his master with the fidelity and devotion of his race, had accompanied him in his many travels throughout the country, was an excellent interpreter, and had directed his household with the thoroughness and conscientiousness of an upright and honest man, devoted to his master's interests.

De Güldenfeldt felt that in losing this bright and intelligent companion of many lonely hours, he was losing half himself. "One shall be taken and the other left," he murmured, as unrestrained

the tears fell. "Indeed the ways of Providence are strange. Why has this lad, so full of promise and with all before him, been the one taken, while I, a lonely man, with no hold on life, no ties, no inducements to keep me here—am the unfortunate one that is left ?"

And the next day during the sad process of cremation, when, after three brief hours, all that was left of this charming companion of years was a handful of ashes and a few splinters of bone, Stanislas, with a feeling of intense loss and desolation, again asked himself that question. Why was he the one whom Providence had chosen to continue the strife ?

"No one cares for me, no one wants me," he thought, as he sadly supervised the placing of the ashes in the urn.

And to this day those ashes repose, and have incense and flowers offered before them in the grounds of the great Temple of the *Koya San*

CHAPTER V.

HOME NEWS.

While de Güldenfeldt was pursuing his travels, a prey to morbid thoughts increased by this tragic event which had touched him so nearly, and while he was trying to learn that hardest lesson in the world—the lesson to forget, or in his weaker moments, for man is but human after all, dreaming dreams and weaving fancies, dangerous and alluring, Pearl, the chief cause of his depression, yet the subject of those heavenly dreams and fancies, was pursuing the even tenour of her way in Tokyo.

Pearl likewise had passed through her moments of weakness and regret. There were times, indeed, when she arrived at the somewhat humiliating conclusion that, considering all things, there was not much to choose between her manner of acting and that of the foolish girl whom she had taken it upon herself so severely to lecture.

She and her young cousin were much in each other's society at this time, the mere fact of both being placed in fairly similar positions, helping,

perhaps to strengthen the tie of kinship, and that of their mutual affection one for the other.

It was during one of their early morning rides that Mrs. Nugent told Amy of de Güldenfeldt's offer, of her rejection thereof, and of the Swedish Minister's consequent irritation and final disappearance from the centre of operations.

At this information confided to her, a mischievous gleam sparkled from Miss Mendovy's eyes.

"Really, my dear Pearl," she said, very fairly imitating her cousin's voice and manner, "I must speak seriously to you. How could you have been so foolish as to have treated Monsieur de Güldenfeldt as if he were a mere boy? I have no patience with you, Pearl. You forget that the Swedish Minister is a man in a thousand,—a delightful man, a clever man, and from a worldly point of view an excellent match, etc., etc., etc. Don't you think, my dear," she added, turning round in her saddle, and glancing at Pearl with a face brimming over with laughter, "don't you think that these, your own words remember, addressed no doubt perfectly justly to your erring but I assure you long-ago-repentant cousin, might apply most admirably in your own case? It is rather a pity you were so 'previous,' I think, wasting your breath on me, instead of reserving it or your own delinquencies."

"It seems to me," replied Pearl, as she gave a little flick to her mare, "that you in your eloquence, Miss Amy, are forgetting one vital difference in the two cases. Whereas you, by your own confession, are in love with Sir Ralph Nicholson, and what is more, have been in this blissful condition for ages, I have no feeling for Monsieur de Güldenfeldt but that of great liking, and the very deepest admiration for his cleverness and wit. This rather alters the situation, don't you think, you extremely sarcastic and facetious young person?"

"Oh, love!" ejaculated Amy with uptilted nose, "pray who thinks nowadays of such an out-of-date sentiment as love? What is love, compared to the advantages of a profitable marriage? Besides, Pearl, if you are not in love with him, you ought to be. He's a dear man, and you have recklessly and deliberately thrown away an excellent chance. And for what? An idea, a mere antiquated worn-out idea. And that's a fact, so it is no use trying to make out the contrary."

"You are doubtless right, Amy, perfectly right," answered Pearl in an unusually humble voice, "I know I am never likely to get such a chance again. Considering my position, it was a stroke of luck I had no right to expect, and yet—and yet—My dear Amy, it comes to this, it's no use talking to a girl like you. You've never been

married, so how can you in the least realize what marriage means? I know, to my cost, only too well what it entails. So is it to be wondered at that I hesitate before making a second venture, however advisable to your inexperienced eyes such a marriage may seem?"

They trotted on in silence for some minutes, then Amy replied somewhat dubiously,

"You are right, Pearl. Of course I can't in the least know the consequences, good or bad, of matrimony. What is more, as far as I can see, I am never likely to have the chance of finding out. For I am decided on one point—nobody but Ralph shall have the honour of calling me wife, an honour which, so far, that young man seems in no hurry whatsoever to burden himself with. It is ages and ages since he condescended to come near me. And when by chance, once in a blue moon, we do happen to meet, His Excellency as a rule is far too occupied with some other fascinating member of the fair sex to think it worth his while to hardly cast me a glance of recognition. Rather different from the old days, eh, Pearl?"

"You brought it on yourself, my dear cousin."

"I confess, Pearl, I have hitherto looked upon you as a fairly intelligent woman. Another lost illusion, I suppose. Pray, how does the fact of my having brought this state of things on myself

in the least alter or improve matters? Bother the men! Don't let's talk any more about them. The world would certainly be far jollier if they didn't exist. I see," she added with a serio-comic twinkle in her eye, "there is only one thing left for me to do, and that is to pray that Sir Ralph's ultimate fate in the shape of a wife may be a shrew, the plague of his life, someone who will lead him a nice dance in fact. Then perhaps he may feel inclined to indulge in some moments of regret that he did not stick a little longer to dear, amiable, sweet-tempered Amy Mendovy. Come along, Pearl, let's have a canter, and for one brief moment forget that disagreeable appendage—man."

But Amy was not fated to be in luck that morning, for shortly afterwards a sharp turn in the road brought the two ladies face to face with that particular "appendage" who was evidently engrossing Miss Mendovy's thoughts. Ralph was accompanied by two extremely pretty girls, all three on horseback, and apparently, from their peals of happy laughter, in the highest of spirits and the greatest good humour with themselves and the world in general.

Amy Mendovy flushed crimson, and with a bow that included the whole party, she gave a cut to her pony, and trotted quickly on, while Pearl, calling out to one of the girls, "I hope

you have had a nice ride this lovely morning Eulalie," followed after her cousin.

"Why did you not stop, Amy?" she asked as she caught her up. "The de Bourvilles reined in their horses with the intention of having a chat. They looked so astonished and annoyed when you went tearing past them in that strange, erratic manner."

"If you find the society of those girls so fascinating, my dear, why did you pay any attention to my movements, and not stop yourself?" replied Amy sharply.

"I had to follow you. If I had not done so it would have made your behaviour appear still more markedly rude," answered Pearl quietly. "As it is, they may possibly attribute our tearing past them in that extraordinary manner, to some real necessity for haste."

"I really don't in the least care what they think. The opinions of the Mesdemoiselles de Bourville never have interested me, nor will they ever interest me in the very slightest degree. The only thing that distresses me somewhat is to see two unfortunate girls, neither of whom have the vaguest notion of sitting a horse, attempting to ride."

"Well, you see, they are merely beginners. No doubt as they go out now so often with Sir Ralph he will soon teach them to sit straight," replied Pearl rather maliciously. "They've got

nice figures, and are both adorably pretty. I'm sure their habits are English made."

"Doubtless," said Amy, with a slight drawl, which she affected when she wished to appear bored, "but really their riding habits excite me as little as the owners themselves. Do let us talk of something more interesting, Pearl."

Pearl smiled quietly to herself as she thought, with a certain satisfaction, how quickly the remedy which she herself had prescribed was working on the all-unconscious patient. "I have never seen Amy in such a temper, or heard her use such an unpleasant tone towards other girls before," she thought. "Poor child! She's green with jealousy. No wonder! when in the old days there was never a question of Ralph riding with anyone but herself. Dear, wise Ralph! if only you continue to play your cards as well as you have started, there's no reason whatsoever, knowing my fair cousin as I do, but that you will be married to her whenever you choose to fix the day."

That same morning, on her return from her ride, Pearl found she was likely to have far more serious matters than Amy's affairs of the heart to occupy her mind.

The mail had come in, an event that ordinarily did not greatly excite Mrs. Nugent. Having shut herself off from all old associations, all former connections, she seldom, with the excep-

tion of an occasional communication from her banker or lawyer, received much of interest by the post, the pile of newspapers and magazines, despatched to her weekly, being her sole and only means of keeping in touch with the outer world.

But this morning, on entering her cosy little boudoir, one glance at the writing table showed, lying in a prominent place, a couple of letters, one from Mr. Hall and the other in a former well-known and altogether dreaded handwriting. No need to lift the letter from the table to recognize only too well the once familiar, but now almost forgotten writing of the husband whom she had divorced. On perceiving it she made an exclamation of dismay, for a moment hesitating whether she should not destroy unread this unexpected and most unwelcome missive. Nevertheless, though vexed and irritated, the sight of the letter aroused no keen feelings in her mind. Since she had freed herself from him, the writer himself had grown so completely indifferent—belonging so entirely to that black chapter of the past, which, until reopened by Nicholson, she had flattered herself was closed for ever—that she felt, whatever he might elect to write, whatever insults, whatever injuries might be addressed to her in this letter, no sentiment but that of a sort of dreary contempt, a partial and temporary irri-

tation unworthy even of the name of anger, was now capable of being once more stirred to life.

Indifference to vituperation did not however, carry her so far as to swamp all natural feelings of curiosity, and when, after a few moments of deliberation, she lifted the letter by the corner, she examined the envelope with a certain interest and wonder. The letter was fully directed to her present name and address, a fact which, on consideration, caused an incipient fear, and certainly unbounded astonishment.

So he knew not only of her change of name, but of her whereabouts, by what occult means she did not wait to consider, but delaying no longer, Pearl hastily opened the epistle, and read the following contents:

"Dear Pearl,

"I do not for one moment flatter myself "that it is likely you should take the smallest "interest in the fate of the man who once "called himself your husband. As, however, "I am informed that surely—and I am "personally convinced by no means slowly— "my days are numbered, I am writing before "the breath vanishes for ever from this poor "suffering body, to make, entirely for my own "satisfaction, a certain communication to "you.

"I am leaving you—for reasons which it is

"hardly necessary for me to enumerate—the "complete mistress of my fortune. For fear, "however, that you should be deluded into "the belief that this proceeding is an act of, "what you might be pleased to consider "reparation on my part, I wish before the end "comes, to entirely disabuse your mind of "that fallacy.

"I am a dying man, it is true, but a worn-"out carcass does not necessarily entail a "clouded or impaired intelligence. My "mind, believe me, is as clear as when you "knew me, and I solemnly here announce on "my death-bed a fact, which except in public "you have heretofore never given me the "chance of declaring, that in my marital "relations, I was as deeply wronged, as you "no doubt are perfectly justified in considering "I wronged you.

"You obtained your divorce by the breadth "of a hair, you will doubtless remember. "The fact that after having achieved "your ends no marriage with Martin-"worth took place, did not for one "instant throw dust in my eyes, whatever "may have been the effect on that individual "himself, or on the many, who at that time, "called themselves your friends. I repeat, "that for many years I possessed the positive

"conviction that Martinworth was your lover.
"In no wise did this fact interfere with me
"or my plans. Indeed, the knowledge that
"you were agreeably occupied entirely suited
"my book, and under the circumstances I
"found it a natural and convenient arrange-
"ment for all parties concerned.

"If, my dear Pearl, you had only shown
"that cleverness which you had exhibited for
"so many years, and if instead of dragging me
"into the Divorce Court you had been satis-
"fied to let well alone, we should have con-
"tinued a comfortable *ménage à trois* till the
"end of the chapter. That chapter, as far
"as I am concerned, would soon have closed,
"and in three or four years' time you would
"have found yourself, while still fairly young
"and extremely handsome, playing the satis-
"factory and the justifiable *rôle* of the
"bereaved, but by no means inconsolable
"widow. That awkward impediment the
"husband, having been conveniently dis-
"posed of underground, no stumbling block
"would have stood in the way of legalizing
"your position, by a marriage at some fashion-
"able church, to which interesting ceremony
"lustre would have been added by the
"presence, no doubt, of the smartest set in
"Town.

"But you were too hasty in your desire to "cast off your shackles. Seeing, however, "the precious little use you have made of "your freedom, is it to be wondered at that "my breath should have been taken away "by such an exhibition of complete *manque* "*de savoir faire*. By one, too, whom, when "I gave myself the trouble to think about "her at all, I certainly considered possessed "that quality to perfection.

"What? I ask you, have you gained by "this most ill-advised step, on the taking of "which, if you had only consulted me, I "should most certainly, for your own sake, "have counselled you against? Have you "achieved liberty of action? Certainly not. "Before your divorce you were completely "free. A firmer and less compromising stand "in society? Hardly, you must allow, con- "sidering the many doubtful and unpleasant "incidents of your life, that to shield my own "reputation my counsel had to bring to light. "Undisturbed union with your lover? Your "own subsequent and most inexplicable be- "haviour forfeited for ever all chance of such "a future.

"Now, in the place of gain, compare your "losses. Exile from your native land. The "loss of the protection of your husband's

"name. The loss of the constant com-
"panionship of an adoring lover, and while
"you were my wife, however much you
"might have thought fit to scorn that posi-
"tion, the loss of a tangible and by no
"means insignificant place in that society,
"which for over ten years had been to you
"as the very breath of your nostrils.

"Oh! poor, blind, benighted fool! I
"cannot but pity you, Pearl, my rage and
"spite having long ago exhausted themselves.
"It is to prove to you this truth, namely, that
"I have no bitterness, no rancour, that I am
"acting as I do, leaving you the complete
"controller of that fortune, which, from the
"fact of you having shared it for so many
"years, you well know is by no means incon-
"siderable. Do as you will with it. As you
"will see, it is yours without conditions. You
"in your turn can leave this wealth to whom
"you desire, my own few distant relatives
"having no claim whatsoever upon me.

"One word more before I close these
"lines.

"Once, being no longer master of my
"actions, I was so unfortunate as to strike
"you. It was principally on the fact of that
"blow that you obtained your divorce. I
"apologise to you for this deed. I can only

"add that, whatever the provocation, I "should never have acted thus in my sober "moments.

"And now, adieu. By the time you "receive this I shall, in all probability be "beneath the sod. No doubt you will experi- "ence a certain natural satisfaction in feeling "assured that for the future you no longer "can be troubled by

"GUY NORRYWOOD."

Pearl stood for a long time with this letter clasped tightly in her hand, a prey to strangely mixed feelings. Though, during all the years they had spent together, Norrywood had evidently not considered it worth his while to express his opinion, she nevertheless had by no means been in ignorance of her husband's true sentiments towards her. Before the crash she in her turn, had scorned to confute or to argue this opinion, though if she had for a moment supposed that every questionable position, every compromising action on her part was to have been brought as evidence against her in her own suit, she certainly would have taken more pains in those early days, even to the man whom she despised so thoroughly, to have explained and proved her innocence. But neither she, nor Martinworth, nor her Counsel had for one moment contemplated such a step on Norrywood's part, and

indeed at one time it was believed the case would proceed in its course undefended. Judge then of her astonishment when her husband appeared in Court armed with these many powerful, aye! deadly weapons against her. Too late then to explain or temporize, and Pearl in bitterness of spirit realised fully her egregious folly in having from the very commencement so completely scorned, so entirely despised her foe.

Bitter memories were aroused in Mrs. Nugent's breast by the perusal of this letter—memories and regrets and rage that long had remained dormant, so much so, that she asked herself whether after all, her philosophy was beginning to play her false. But Norrywood's unvarnished opinion of her, the complete cynicism of his plain speaking, the crude bluntness, brutality indeed, of his well-weighed and deliberate conclusions touched her not at all. She had all along been aware of his opinion, and to some extent she could comprehend his having arrived at such an unflattering conclusion, and almost forgave him for it. She felt, however, a slight regret that he should have died unchanged in this belief, especially as on the whole the letter aroused her sympathies, and a vague feeling of pity in her breast. She read between the lines, and in spite of his refutation of the same, she knew that this will in her favour was an act of reparation—tardy amends for all he

had made her suffer during his lifetime. The act, if not the words, confessed remorse. Such being the case, and with this barrier of the tomb between them, she felt that she could forgive him much. She had never for one instant contemplated the possibility of inheriting his money. She did not wish for it, and as she restored the letter to the envelope she deluded herself with the belief that no power on earth could force her to accept this undesired, this unexpected gift.

But there was still Mr. Hall's letter to be read. It was, she perceived, dated ten days later than that of her husband, and contained the contents of his will and the details of his miserable death, which had taken place suddenly a few days after the writing of this last long epistle.

"Your former husband," wrote Mr. Hall, "has for the last year been suffering from an "extremely painful, and from the first, incur- "able disease. I was surprised that I, and "not his own lawyer, should be called in to "draw up his last will and testament, but his "reasons for this act were later on, explained. "I was touched by the great change I per- "ceived in the poor sufferer's whole character "and demeanour, and though nothing I "could say would induce him to change his "opinion on one point,—namely, as to your "relations with Lord Martinworth,—the

"approach of Death, that great Softener, had "melted the hitherto stony heart, and he "spoke gently and kindly of you, and with a "genuine regret for the constant sorrow of "which he had been the cause. Mr. Norry- "wood's standard of morals, as we know to "our cost, was at no times a high one. Pre- "sumably it was owing to this fact that he "appeared to think the intimacy, which to "the last he insisted existed between you "and his lordship, was not otherwise than "natural, and by no means blamable under "the circumstances of his own acknow- "ledged infidelity to you. But what seemed "to astonish him beyond words was the "fact of your having gone to the length "of putting him into Court at all. He "told me he wished, before he died, to "express what he had so far never had an "opportunity of doing, his opinion of your "folly in taking this step. 'Naturally I had "to defend myself,' he said, 'and the conse- "quences have been my wife's social ruin.' "He said much more on this point, and "concluded by asking for your address for "the purpose—he told me—of expressing his "sentiments, and of informing you of his "monetary intentions towards you.

"Considering it was the request of a

"dying man, I felt—in spite of your strict "injunctions to the contrary, and conse- "quently certain qualms of conscience on "my part—that the only thing I could do in "the circumstances was to accede to his re- "quest. I therefore wrote down for him "your present name and address, and I can "only trust, my dear young friend, that Mr. "Norrywood, in this his last letter to you, "confined himself to facts, inscribing "nothing of a particularly unkind or painful "nature.

"You will see by the enclosed copy of "the will that Mr. Norrywood has left you a "very wealthy woman. However distasteful "the source may be from which the money "springs, remember, my child, that much "good can be done with this large fortune, "of which you are left complete mistress, "now and for the future. Knowing you as I "do, I am convinced that your first impulse "will be to refuse this wealth. But I also "believe that on impartial and thoughtful "consideration you will understand the im- "mense folly of such a step. Indeed, a great "portion of it having been settled on you at "your marriage, must be yours in any case. "So do not act hastily, but remember that in "years to come there may be others besides

"yourself who can be benefited by these "large sums.

"I should much like to know your inten- "tions as to the future. Have you any "thoughts of returning home? Your absence "has been a long one. The persons that you "dreaded are removed from your path, "—one by death and the other by marriage. "It is therefore hardly necessary for me to "point out that on inheriting this fortune "your presence, for a short period at least in "your native land, is highly desirable, I may "even add, necessary."

Mr. Hall concluded his letter with various business details as to investments, etc., also with much fatherly and kind advice, which he considered it his duty to offer, but which no one knew better than he himself was more likely to be ignored than followed.

Pearl, with puckered brow, was still standing by her writing table, pondering over these momentous and upsetting communications, when a *'ricksha* rattled up to the door, and a moment later Mrs. Rawlinson was in the room.

"Dearest Rosina," exclaimed Pearl as she embraced her cousin, "what a wonderful woman you are! You have the blessèd knack of always appearing on the spot when most needed. I was wishing for you so much, and was just con-

templating ordering the carriage and driving round to Azabu."

"What's the matter now?" enquired Mrs. Rawlinson, as she glanced at the two letters in Pearl's hand with a certain alarm in her brown eyes.

"I want you to read these letters brought by this morning's mail. No, this one first."

Rosina took Mr. Norrywood's letter handed to her, and walking to the window stood with her back to Mrs. Nugent. She read it straight through, and until she had replaced it in the envelope made no remark.

"Well, I suppose, judging from what he writes of his condition, the poor man must be dead by this time," and Rosina's cheerful voice as she turned round contrasted rather ludicrously with the *figure de circonstance* conjured up for the occasion.

"Yes," said Pearl quietly, "he is dead."

"It's no use humbugging, and pretending one is sorry when one isn't," retorted Mrs. Rawlinson. "To put it mildly, Pearl, that man's death is—is—what shall we say? Well, let us call it a merciful release. That's an expression that can hurt no one."

"He's done me no harm for some years, and time softens things," replied Pearl gently. "I think, too, he was perhaps sorry at the last."

"Hum! death-bed repentance," said Mrs. Rawlinson drily. "I've not much faith in that sort of thing myself. So easy to say you are sorry when circumstances over which you have no control make it impossible for you to have the chance of doing further harm. At any rate, I am glad to see that his repentance—if repentance it was—took a tangible form, and that in dying he had the decency to make certain amends for his disgraceful conduct towards you during his lifetime. You'll be a rich woman, Pearl. Let us trust, dear, that you will make better use of the money than he did."

"Yes," said Pearl, "I shall be rich, very rich, if I accept the money."

"If—what?" and Rosina stared.

"If I accept Mr. Norrywood's money," repeated Pearl. "I have by no means decided to do so, Rosina."

"Are you mad?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"My dear Pearl," and Mrs. Rawlinson settled herself squarely in an arm chair, "I shall not even give myself the trouble of demanding your reasons for this totally absurd, ridiculously quixotic hesitation on your part."

"Such being the case," retorted Pearl with a slight flush, "I shall likewise, greatly to my relief, be exempted from the trouble of informing

you of them. Nevertheless I am, I confess, somewhat disappointed, for I flattered myself that you at least, Rosina, would have understood my motives—my—well—my scruples on this point."

"Well, then, I don't, and that's a fact," replied her cousin tersely. "The man, as all the world knows, treated you shamefully, made your life a misery from the very commencement. After putting up for years not only with neglect and infidelity, but with downright cruelty, you had the strength of mind to appeal to the law, and to divorce him. He is dying, and he writes you a letter. And even on his death-bed he cannot resist insulting you—accusing you of various disgraceful and altogether impossible actions. He has however, enough decency left in his composition to apologise for one of the many hundreds of his villainous acts, and, above all, he makes a certain reparation by leaving you his fortune. After all, my dear Pearl, a large portion of that fortune is already yours. He made excellent settlements, I remember, and you have been profiting by the interest of that sum ever since you left him. I really can't see the difference if, instead of a portion—the quarter, the half, whatever has hitherto been yours—you should for the future take over the whole of the fortune."

Pearl was silent. Rosina's calm unemotional manner of regarding matters always influenced

her more impulsive and excitable nature. She felt there was much good sense and wisdom in what her cousin said.

"You seem to be of the same opinion as Mr. Hall," she said, after a minute. "He thinks I ought to keep the money. You will see what he says in this letter."

"He is a good friend to you, Pearl, that old lawyer," remarked Mrs. Rawlinson, as after carefully reading the letter, she returned it to Mrs. Nugent. "I can only impress on you to follow his and my advice. Above all, don't act in a hurry. What do you intend to do about going home?"

"Oh! spare me, Rosina! Why, I have only just received these letters. I haven't thought of making plans. But who knows? If my presence in England is really necessary for business purposes, I may possibly take a trip home after the summer. But my absence will be only temporary. I shall return. While you are here, Rosina dear, Japan will always be my home."

"Well! there might be worse places," and Mrs. Rawlinson pulled down her veil, preparatory to departure, "in spite of slight drawbacks in the way of distance, typhoons, earthquakes, etc. By the way, I wanted to telephone to you on Wednesday after that awful shock, but the wires were disarranged. Were you frightened? Did you suffer much loss?"

"Several of my best pieces of Imari china were smashed," replied Pearl, "and I picked up my big Delft vase in fear and trembling. But it was uninjured, mercifully. Stranger still, this heavy bronze clock was thrown off the mantelpiece, and was still going when I picked it up. Frightened? I should think I was frightened. I and all the Japanese servants rushed into the garden, and watched the house rocking backwards and forwards, expecting every moment to see it collapse."

"It was the worst earthquake we've had for years," added Rosina, "but it was nothing here compared to what it was in the north. I see by the newspapers whole villages were destroyed, and there has been immense loss of life. Amy will have told you how Tom retired as usual under the table. And did you hear how those two American globe-trotters, those dear old Miss Mordants, each clutching her own particular Chin dog, fled precipitately from the Grand Hotel, clad in little else than their stockings and chemises, and took refuge in a *'ricksha* in the middle of the Bund? Thus airily clad, with the hood down and the apron up, they insisted on remaining for several hours. And then poor Nelly Richards, who was completely lost, and at last, after a long search, was found up a tree in the garden. I am told no power in heaven or earth would induce her to

desert her tree until dragged down by main force by her infuriated parent."

"Yes, even earthquakes have their comical side. I heard of a certain mutual friend of ours who was indulging in a bath at that moment, and who fled into the street adorned tastefully but extremely simply in a high hat and a walking-stick," and Pearl laughed, but a second later her face became once more overclouded, and she sighed deeply.

"Now my dear," said Rosina, as she took her in her arms and kissed her affectionately, "be your own brave philosophical self, and don't worry about things. And as for your late husband, the last thing you could possibly manage to do is to mourn him, you know. Personally, I make no attempt to disguise how greatly relieved I am that a merciful Providence has thought fit to remove him from this troublesome world to another, and,—we'll hope,—a brighter sphere. While he was alive, in spite of your divorce, one could never feel quite sure that he might not take it into that evil head of his to annoy you in some way. Why! who knows? He might have turned up here in Tokyo!"

"There may be, for all you think, a far worse danger threatening me than the unexpected arrival of a divorced husband," murmured Pearl oracularly.

She was on the verge of confiding to Rosina the probable arrival in Japan of Lord Martinworth. She would have done so if it had not been that, since those few confidential conversations held on Pearl's first arrival three years ago, the name and even the existence of Martinworth had, by a sort of tacit consent and mutual understanding, been ignored by the two women in all later intercourse. Pearl was longing for Rosina's sympathy and advice in the difficulties she saw before her, but an incipient feeling of shyness, a kind of *mauvaise honte*, prevented her from venturing to reopen a subject which for so long had been closed between them. She therefore held her peace.

"After all," she thought, as she seated herself at her writing table after Mrs. Rawlinson's departure, "it may simply be a mare's nest of Sir Ralph's. Dick may never come in the end. A thousand incidents may occur to cause him to change his mind. And even if he and his wife do come to Japan, it is just as likely we shall not meet. What scores of globe-trotters visit this country whom I never see. I can easily abstain for the next two or three months from accepting invitations to the English Legation, the one place where we are likely to run across each other. Yes, after all, I am glad I said nothing to Rosina."

And yet in spite of all her sophistries, deep down in her heart of hearts, Pearl never doubted

for a moment but that it was ordained by fate that Dick Martinworth should visit Japan, and that once again, whether for weal or for woe she knew not, their paths in life should cross.

Mr. Hall's and Rosina's arguments combined carried weight, and the next mail conveyed a letter from Mrs. Nugent to the former, in which no mention was made of renouncing the wealth left her. Indeed, enclosed with the letter was the rough draft of a will, by which, with the exception of a very substantial legacy to Mrs. Rawlinson, and another to the old lawyer himself, the whole of Pearl's vast fortune was left unconditionally to her young cousin, Miss Amy Mendovy.

CHAPTER VI.

A WOMAN'S WOMANLINESS.

The Imperial Cherry garden party was fixed that year for the 21st of April, the day proving one of the most perfect of a perfect Japanese spring.

Pearl had been prevented from attending both the spring parties that had taken place since her arrival. Therefore, though suffering from a certain depression of spirits which, in spite of her efforts to the contrary, possessed her at times, she found herself looking forward with considerable pleasure to the coming event.

As a member of the Rawlinson family she had a right to an invitation. She accompanied her cousins, and as they drove towards the Hama-Goten Palace, Mrs. Rawlinson's critical eyes rested admiringly on Pearl's beautiful face, and on the almost equal loveliness of her young niece seated opposite to her. Her heart swelled with natural pride as she complacently smoothed out the creases of the purple shot silk that in various forms and shapes had graced many an Imperial garden party.

"There's not the slightest doubt," she ejaculated, "but that my niece and my cousin will be two of the prettiest and best dressed women at the party to-day. You are both of you, my dears, looking perfectly charming. Don't you agree with me, Tom? Come now, say something, you tiresome person. Pay your relatives a compliment for once in a way."

Mr. Rawlinson opened his lazy eyes with somewhat of an effort.

"Both Pearl and Amy are quite vain enough of their looks without any compliments from me," he grunted. "The only thing unusual that I observe about them to-day is that the things they are wearing on their heads look, if anything, a shade more absurd and grotesque than they do even on ordinary occasions. My dear Rosina, I do wish you would leave me alone, and make the proper use of your parasol, instead of employing it for the sole purpose of poking me in the ribs. It is bad enough to be dragged to this infernal garden-party, without being massacred before I get there."

This last remark was accompanied with a twinkle in the very kindly eyes. Tom Rawlinson was somewhat of a rough diamond, and he affected a certain gruffness both in speech and manner. His bark, however, was well known for being considerably worse than his bite, and many there were

who could vouch for his open-handedness in their moments of distress and need, his ever-ready helpful generosity, and above all, that priceless treasure in this unfeeling world—a warm heart.

"Now don't call the garden-party names, my dear, just because you would prefer to be wasting this beautiful day in that stupid, stuffy office of yours. And, Amy, don't pay any attention to what your uncle says. Your hat is very pretty. I am sure it ought to be, as nothing was considered good enough for your ladyship but a fabrication from Paris. By the bye, Pearl, do you know anything about Sir Ralph Nicholson? Is he still here? He never comes our way now. What's the matter with him? I have seen him once since his return, and he appeared considerably changed from the genial, pleasant fellow that I remember him."

Both Pearl and Amy reddened at Mrs. Rawlinson's questions. Neither conscience was entirely free from guilt.

"Yes," answered the former hesitatingly, "he is still here. He came to see me yesterday, and said that he would be at the party to-day. But here we are," she added, as with a certain relief she saw the entrance to the Palace gardens.

"Oh, Pearl, isn't it lovely?" exclaimed Amy. "I never saw the cherry trees so beautiful as they are this year."

They walked through the picturesque grounds, planted with the world-famed cherry tree, heavy with its fragrant mass of blossom. Interspersed was the graceful *momiji*, or spring maple, clothed in its luxurious mantle of brilliant red, forming with the dark foliage of the lofty pines, and the varied greens of rare and ancient trees in all their rich and perfect beauty, an enchanting contrast to the cloudless azure sky above. Pearl for a moment, in her admiration of these beauties of nature, perfected by the cunning art of man, forgot to be anxious and unhappy. Her sweet face was no longer grave, and her eyes shone, as, giving herself up to the enjoyment of the hour, she experienced the charm of gazing at a landscape glorified at that moment by glowing, brilliant sunshine, and scented by the delicate odour of a myriad faintly-tinted, profusely clustering blooms.

Her eyes revelled in the unrivalled beauty of these lovely grounds, and only when she arrived at the waiting place beneath the ancient and wide-spreading trees, and was quickly surrounded and greeted by her many friends, did she realise that she was there not merely to admire, but, in her turn, to be equally admired.

She was in an animated conversation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Belgian and Spanish *Chefs de Mission*, when Amy came up to her.

"Fancy, Pearl," she exclaimed, "Baron de Pennett has just told me that Monsieur de Güldenfeldt is still away at Sendai and Hakodate, and all sorts of out-of-the-way places. You are guilty of keeping him away like this," she added in a whisper. "He loves these functions as a rule. But no doubt he has forgotten all about you by this time. Men are strange animals. Talk about the fickleness and changeableness of women indeed! Just look at the pronounced way Sir Ralph is flirting with that strong-minded looking female in magenta. Not that I care a bit, you know. Though I can't say I particularly admire his taste, do you?" And Amy's dark orbs flashed disdainfully.

Pearl let her eyes travel in the direction indicated, and, as she looked, a puzzled expression came into them. "I seem to know that face," she said musingly. "Where can I have seen it before?"

She was still pondering, when her thoughts were interrupted by a man's voice behind her enquiring, in a strong foreign accent, "Madame Nugent, may I be allowed to have the honour of presenting an old friend of mine to you?" and turning, Pearl with no previous warning of the ordeal before her, met Lord Martinworth face to face.

The meeting was so unexpected,—for she had

gathered from Sir Ralph that it would still be some weeks before the Martinworth's arrival,—that Pearl found herself murmuring commonplaces, and mechanically bowing, as she would have murmured and bowed to a complete stranger. Later on she realised how dazed, how completely lost she had been at the moment. It was only on perceiving the deathly pallor of the face before her that she remembered that she was in public, that a thousand eyes were upon her, and with a supreme effort she partially succeeded in recovering her presence of mind.

Lord Martinworth had been standing conversing with Count Carlitti, a member of one of the Foreign Legations and a former acquaintance whom he had unearthed in Tokyo, when the latter caught sight of Pearl's tall figure and straight back, clad in a perfectly cut gown. He had already announced himself as one of her many admirers, though, having only lately arrived in Japan, he was unacquainted as yet with the gossip of his new post. Always talking himself, and never giving another a chance to put in a word, he was so far, in ignorance of Mrs. Nugent's history. He had heard vaguely that she was separated from her husband, a fact which he considered much in her favour, for in the opinion of this vivacious gentleman every pretty woman profited much, certainly as far as he personally

was concerned, in being placed in a position more or less irregular or equivocal. At any rate, if unfortunately a husband did happen to exist, the more such an inconvenient appendage remained in the background, the greater approval was the lady of the hour likely to find in Count Carlitti's soft brown eyes.

Those eyes were ever on the look out for a pretty face or a rounded bust. His taste in female beauty was considered, certainly by himself if by no one else, indisputable. So when at the Club he had once given out that there was no doubt whatsoever but that Mrs. Nugent was *la plus belle femme de Tokyo*, no one troubled, even if they disagreed, to contradict one who counted himself such an experienced judge of the correct and classic lines of feminine loveliness.

"I must, *mon ami*," he said to Martinworth, "present you to *une beauté—mais une beauté incomparable!* Madame Nugent is English. You see that beautiful, straight back, and leetle head poised so haughtily? Ah, I perceive you admire! But wait, *mon ami*, till you see her face. And when you will have seen her face, wait a leetle longer till you have seen her *en robe de bal! Quelles epaules mon cher, ah! quelles epaules!* Then tell me if we do not possess a gem in *ce triste Tokyo.*"

The introduction promptly followed, and shortly afterwards Count Carlitti was heard

relating that *la parfaite beauté de cette Madame Nugent* had made such an impression on *ce brave Martinworth* that he had actually trembled, and turned ashen from the violence of his emotions.

"My triumph is complete," he was saying to Tom Spence, a junior member of the English Legation. "*C'etait le coup de foudre!*"

"*Coup de foudre*, by Jove! I should just think it must have been," exclaimed Spence. "Why, my dear fellow, Martinworth is the very man with whom Mrs. Nugent (that's not her real name, you know) was mixed up with in that divorce-suit two or three years ago. She came out here, they say, to get rid of him. And now you go and introduce them to each other as if they had never met before! Ha, ha, ha! upon my word, that's the best joke, the rummest situation I have ever heard of!"

"*Mon Dieu*," exclaimed Carlitti, with a shrug of his shoulders, "if women change their names, how is it possible to know the right—what do you call it—co-respondents—that belong to them? *Mais sapristi! quelle guigne!*"

"What is the matter, Count?" asked Lady Thomson, who, with her husband the English Minister, at that moment joined the two young men. "You look quite upset. An unusual state of things for you."

"Carlitti has just been distinguishing himself

by introducing Lord Martinworth to Mrs. Nugent," explained the amused Spence. "He evidently wished for a sensation."

The British Minister was a very dignified person, and no one realised better than His Excellency himself that he was assisting in a prominent position at an important Court function. At his Secretary's words however, he screwed up his mouth into the form of a button, and a sound very like a whistle issued from his lips.

"My dear Carlitti, what a terrible situation! You mean to say you didn't know about the divorce, and all the rest of it?"

"*Mais naturellement, Monsieur le Ministre, je n'en savais rien.* I desired to make a pleasure to *mon ami Martinworth*, for he knows himself well *en beauté de femme.* And I was assured that he would admire *la belle Madame Nugent. Après tout j'avais raison, je connais bien son gôut.*"

"Yes! you are quite right, Count," murmured the English wife of one of the German Secretaries, equally remarkable for her extreme prettiness, her sharp tongue, and her very many indiscretions, "Lord Martinworth certainly knows something about the good points of *le beau sexe.* As for Mrs. Nugent, he has had in her case, I am told, many years of leisure in London to study this particular example. Well, now he can re-commence, and can still further improve himself in

what you dear, foolish men tell us is an absorbing and inexhaustible occupation,—the study of the female heart. Dear Mrs. Nugent's heart must be so very, very interesting. It is a pity that, so far, this boring, dull Tokyo has never provided her with an adorer, to help to solve its mysteries."

"Don't, I pray you, waste your pity where it is not required, my dear little Countess,' laughed Lady Thomson. "Mrs. Nugent could have had I feel assured, as many adorers as she desired. But you know as well as I do, that in spite of her somewhat difficult position she does not lay herself out for admiration and that sort of thing. She is certainly not a bit of a flirt. By the bye," she added *sotto voce* to her husband, "do you think I ought to say anything to her about that horrid man's death, and the fortune? Or shall I ignore the whole subject? What do you think about it?"

"By all means hold your tongue," replied the cautious diplomatist. "To refer to the fellow's death would be in the worst possible taste. Why, I see she doesn't even wear mourning, and quite right, too. It would be the height of hypocrisy. Come along, my dear. Collect the wives of my secretaries and those other ladies whom it is your duty to introduce to the Empress, for it will soon be our turn to be received in audience. We must take our place."

For the rest of that afternoon Count Carlitti retired into the background, and this usually volatile gentleman was extremely silent and considerably suppressed. Allowing for a certain amount of exaggeration, the description he gave Tom Spence of Lord Martinworth's demeanour at the moment of introduction was far from being incorrect. If, instead of bounding away after someone else, Carlitti had remained a little longer on the spot, his surprise would have been greatly increased by hearing the one word, "Pearl," issuing in deep, astounded tones from the man's lips, and by witnessing the intense look of joy that, after the first shock of amazement, illumined the handsome but somewhat stern features. To show emotion at an unexpected meeting, neither words nor violent outbursts of excitement are necessary. Lord Martinworth and Pearl Nugent met, and had at one glance, recognised each other. She had let her trembling hand lie in his for a moment, while that one look, that one word, had passed between them. She could not have spoken if her life had depended on the opening of her lips, and she felt it indeed a cause of thankfulness when the Court Chamberlains chose that moment to divide the crowd, forming it into two lines facing each other, and when in the necessary confusion, Martinworth was separated from her

The *Corps Diplomatique* took up their stand in line, by order of precedence, the rest of the crowd placing themselves beyond and behind, where they could obtain the best view. The military bands repeated one after the other, the very solemn and impressive National Anthem, while their Imperial Majesties, accompanied by the Princes and Princesses of the Blood and all the Court, walked slowly by between the two lines of their respectful subjects, and that of the *Corps Diplomatique*, acknowledging graciously the deferential salutations of this large gathering of people. Immediately on the passing of the Court, the *Corps Diplomatique* took their place in the procession. The crowds of guests followed, and Pearl found herself leaning heavily on Nicholson's arm, walking, in a sort of trance across the picturesque bridges, and along the lovely verdure-shaded paths.

Ralph had been an anxious and interested spectator of the meeting between his two friends. He was exchanging banalities with Lady Martinworth—the recollection of whose face had proved so great a puzzle to Pearl—when he had observed the greeting, and his kind heart had beaten sympathetically at what he knew must indeed be a terrible ordeal to both.

He witnessed Pearl's sudden dismay, the dazed and frightened look, and the nervous clutch of

the handle of her parasol. Unceremoniously deserting his companion, he made his way towards Mrs. Nugent, and when everyone started to follow in the procession he without a word, simply drew her arm through his, holding her up through all that long and silent promenade.

When the Imperial party at length arrived at the marquee prepared for them, and the crowd was waiting expectantly on the turf outside, Ralph succeeded in obtaining a chair for his companion. Pearl by this time had regained a certain amount of control, and was so far composed that she could watch with interest their Imperial Majesties receiving the members of the *Corps Diplomatique*, and accepting the various presentations that are made to them on these occasions.

While this ceremony was still proceeding, Amy Mendovy occupied with her own affairs, and all unconscious of the event that had just taken place, came up to her cousin.

"You lucky woman," she said, "to have got a chair. I am simply dead with fatigue. But, Pearl," she added, struck with her cousin's pallor and gazing at her with anxiety, "how terribly pale you look. Are you not well, dear?"

"Mrs. Nugent felt the sun a little. I have persuaded her to sit down," replied Nicholson, who

with open parasol was still standing guard over Pearl.

Amy raised her eyebrows, and instead of glancing at him gazed somewhat superciliously down her straight nose. She was feeling deeply offended with Ralph. He had not approached her the whole of that day, and—as she had confessed to Pearl—had indeed scarcely honoured her with his society, at home or abroad, since the memorable piano incident.

Ralph Nicholson was following strictly to the letter Pearl's advice, and was feeling extremely pleased with himself in consequence.

"After all, what clever creatures women are," he thought. "Now, unless it had been put into my dull head, I should never have dreamt of this very easy plan of getting round the little witch. I should simply either have cut it, or else like an idiot have rushed off and proposed again. Either of which proceedings would, according to Mrs. Nugent, have proved fatal to my chances. Now I see My Lady is just wild with me. She won't even look at me. She saw me at work though, as I intended she should do, on that queer fish, Lady Martinworth, who, by the bye, is not half a bad sort and capital company to boot. *Tant mieux*, Miss Mendovy. Your punishment will last considerably longer, I can tell you!"

Thus thought Ralph, as he stood at the back of

Pearl's chair, complacently twirling his moustache, and furtively watching the lady of his dreams.

He found her looking more charming, more seductive than ever to-day, in her pretty gown and extremely becoming hat. Her dark eyes were flashing, the rich colour in her cheeks was coming and going with suppressed excitement, as completely ignoring Nicholson's presence, she bent down and wrapped a lace scarf around Pearl's shoulders.

"I think," said Sir Ralph, this time addressing himself to Pearl, "if you will excuse me, Mrs Nugent, as you have Miss Mendovy with you now, and as I see many of your acquaintances making their way towards you, I will just go and give Lady Martinworth a look. I see her casting signals of distress. She knows no one here in all this crowd, you know. And she is awfully nice."

So with a grin, and a parting glance at the back of Amy's dark head, off he went.

Pearl watched him go. Then she looked at Amy, who had turned, with apparently great animation, to address one of her numerous admirers hard by.

"I hope," she thought, "he won't over-act it. Men can never do things by halves. And of course, two can play at that game."

The truth of which remark Miss Mendovy was determined to prove. For, during the rest of the afternoon she succeeded in attaching to her charming person a by no means unworthy suitor, a certain good-looking Secretary of Legation, who long had been known to sigh hopelessly for her hand.

Pearl never quite recalled how she got through the rest of the ceremony. Afterwards she remembered vaguely catching a somewhat distant view of their Imperial Majesties seated at a table within the tent, discussing their repast in solitary grandeur. Near them were placed the Imperial Princes and Princesses, and beyond were little tables at which were seated the Ministers of State, and the members of the *Corps Diplomatique* with their wives and families. She had a dim recollection of someone forcing her to swallow a fragment of *paté de foie gras* and a glass of champagne, and she once remembered raising her eyes and finding those of Lady Martinworth fixed with a look of mocking enquiry and scrutiny upon her face.

This expression on Lady Martinworth's countenance was an additional shock to the many that Pearl was fated to experience that afternoon. Fortunately shortly after this incident, the Imperial party broke up, thereby allowing the guests the liberty to take their departure, or the long strain

on Pearl's nerves, and the dread that Martinworth would again approach her, would inevitably have culminated in a breakdown.

As it was, her first action on reaching the shelter of her home was a characteristic one of her sex. She shut herself into her drawing room, and walking straight up to the glass over the mantelpiece, she gazed at herself for fully two minutes. In spite of the pallor ot her cheeks this close examination apparently did not prove otherwise than satisfactory, for there was a slight smile about the lips as she drew the long pins from her hat, and laid her head back on the pillows of the sofa.

She was anxious to collect her thoughts, and if possible, to devise some plan for the immediate future. Whether that plan would ever have been formed it is difficult to say. As it was, her cogitations were speedily interrupted by the simple fact of a violent ring at the door bell.

Pearl was on her feet in an instant, and her hand was pressed against her heart to still its beating.

Who could it be ? Was it ?—— Yes, it must be Martinworth, who had probably ascertained without difficulty her whereabouts, and had lost no time in following her.

She experienced a strange sensation—a mixture of disappointment and relief when she realized it,

was not Martinworth's voice, but a woman's, that she heard in the hall.

The next moment Lady Martinworth entered the room.

She made a considerable noise as she strode with long steps toward Pearl, who was standing erect, with a slight look of defiance in her wide-open eyes.

"How do you do, Mrs. Norrywood," she exclaimed, holding out a large hand. "I saw you at the garden party, easily found out where you lived, and thought it best to come on here without delay, to have a necessary yarn with you. No objection, I suppose, to my bearding you in your den like this?" she added, with a broad, decidedly good-natured smile.

Pearl drew herself up, and threw her head back in a manner peculiar to herself. She felt completely mistress of her actions, quite ready for the fray, as she answered calmly:

"Before proceeding further in our interview, Lady Martinworth," the name stuck in her throat, "I think it best that you should be aware that I am known here under the name of Nugent. Will you not sit down?"

"Thanks. Oh! so you have changed your name," was the reply. "Well, perhaps it is just as well in the circumstances."

"I am glad it meets with your approval. May

I offer you a cup of tea, or perhaps a cigarette? You smoke, I believe?"

"Thanks, yes, I smoke. Oh! Egyptians, I see. Fearfully doctored, you know. Couldn't think of drinking tea. I ate enough of that spread this afternoon to last me for a week. Pretty sight, but I was dying to get away to have a smoke, and now, like a good Samaritan, you have come to my rescue." Another broad smile.

Then followed a silence which Pearl for one was determined not to break.

Lady Martinworth threw herself back in her chair, stuck her feet out before her, and made rings with the cigarette smoke.

"Pretty place, this Tokyo. Been here long?" at length she ejaculated.

"I have lived here rather more than three years," replied Pearl quietly. "Have you come to see me for the purpose of obtaining some information about the place or the people?"

"Nothing further from my thoughts, I assure you. You like it better than London, I suppose? Uncommonly dull place to live in, though, I should think. But no accounting for tastes. I didn't know you were here, you know, or of course I shouldn't have been such a brute as to have come pat Joan and disturbed your peace of mind."

Pearl slightly lifted her eyebrows, and looked her companion straight in the face.

"And may I enquire," she asked suavely, "in what possible way you would be likely to do that?"

Lady Martinworth tossed her cigarette into the grate, and rising from her armchair, went and perched herself on the music stool.

"In bringing Martinworth here attached to my apron strings, of course. Hard luck on you both, I call it. Not very pleasant for me, either, you know. Why, he'll detest me more than ever now, which is saying a good deal."

Pearl seated herself in a chair near the music-stool on which her visitor was twirling herself round and round, accompanied by that teeth-edging squeak with which music-stools seem chronically to be affected. She laid her hand on the stool to try to stop the movement.

"Lady Martinworth," she said, "do you not think it would be wiser for us both to keep Lord Martinworth's name out of this conversation? He and I are old friends. We meet again after some years, and we——"

"Oh, I say," interrupted her companion rudely 'stop that. I don't want a long jobation about your and Martinworth's friendship, you know. I know all about *that* Read the whole case from the beginning to the end with the greatest interest. I made up my mind years ago to marry Dick, but of course everyone knew he was otherwise

engaged, and when you got your divorce, it was given out that he would marry you. And so he would have done, if you had not bolted like the little idiot you were. Well, 'tis an ill wind that blows no one any good.' You no sooner made yourself scarce than I seized my opportunity. I needn't tell you *he* never asked me to marry him. I saved him that trouble. And here I am Lady Martinworth, whereas you are.——By the way, by what outlandish name did you say you called yourself?"

Pearl rose and calmly went towards the door which she threw open.

"Lady Martinworth," she said, very slowly and very icily, "no doubt my education has been sadly neglected, but I must confess, in private matters of this kind, I have only been accustomed to dealing with ladies. As therefore, it is absolutely impossible for me to cope with a person of your calibre, I must beg of you to do me the favour of leaving my house directly."

But Lady Martinworth did not stir from her seat. On the contrary, the eternal smile grew broader on the somewhat homely features. She took a single eyeglass from the breast pocket of her coat, and rubbing it with a silk handkerchief, stuck it calmly into her left eye, gazing meanwhile complacently at Pearl.

"Bravo, bravo!" she exclaimed, clapping her

hands, "you really did that very well, you know. What an actress you would make, with your figure and *grand air*. No wonder Martinworth fell in love with you. I admire his excellent taste, 'pon my word, I do. Poor old fellow, it is hard lines on him, that after having been your slave for so long he should now have to fall back on *me*. Never mind, we won't talk about him if you don't like it. Do be a sensible woman. Come and sit down, and leave that door to take care of itself. I'm not going just yet, you know, for I have something I want to say to you."

Much to her own astonishment, Pearl found herself obediently following her ladyship's request. She closed the door, and came once more and sat down by her side.

If she had been asked to do so, she could not have defined her sentiments towards this strange woman, who all unbidden, had forced herself into her presence. Coarse, utterly wanting in tact and delicacy as she seemed to be, there was something about her very honesty and good nature that attracted Pearl. She found herself trying to analyse her companion's character, wondering what there was in it, and in the situation altogether, that was tending to change her sentiments towards her visitor. Was it sympathy she asked herself—a feeling of sorrow that was now taking possession of her?

She answered gently, "Forgive me for my brusqueness. If there is anything you wish to say to me, I shall be willing to listen to you. Can I be of use to you in any way?"

Without a moment's hesitation, Lady Martinworth rose from her seat and clasped Pearl's two hands.

"Yes," she said, "you can be of great use to me, if you will. You can be my friend. Will you?"

There was no reply, for Pearl was deeply considering this extraordinary request. What did it mean? Was the woman sincere, or was it merely a clever move on her part to secure the alliance of a person who otherwise might be an impediment, a dangerous rival? The ups and downs of a stormy existence had developed in Pearl a certain mistrustfulness, a suspiciousness of disposition, otherwise unnatural to her, and considering the circumstances of the case, she felt in no wise inclined to jump at this unexpected proposal. While she was debating in her mind what reply to make, Lady Martinworth spoke again.

"Well, I see you don't like the notion," she said, moving towards the window. "Why should you? I suppose you and I haven't an idea or a taste in common. I have never had a woman friend in my life, and have never wanted to have one. Till now I have always looked on women

as poor creatures. But somehow you seem different from the rest. I liked the way you went to that door and wanted to turn me out. Real plucky I call it, and one so seldom sees pluck in a woman. Then the way you left it when I asked you to do so showed me you had a heart, for I saw you were feeling sorry for me. I've got a heart too, whatever you may think of me. Yes, Mrs. Nugent, I've got a heart. One that is full of love for my husband, too, though he little knows it."

As Lady Martinworth uttered these last words, she might have been called almost pretty. A wonderfully tender light lit up the small eyes, and the wide mouth smiled very sweetly as she continued:

"And that is just it, that is just why I ask you to be my friend. I love my husband. He doesn't care a rap about me, you know. No! not one little bit. In fact, I know there are times when he downright detests me. I well know he is just as devoted to you as ever he was. Of course he has adored you for years. You are a good woman, I know you are, in spite of that nasty speech I made about the divorce case. With your pretty face and unhappy married life you must, of course, have had heaps of temptations, and yet, as I look at you, I feel convinced you have always kept as straight as a die. You have got such nice true

eyes. Yes, 'pon my word, I like you, Mrs. Nugent. I feel you are a trump, and it would make me thoroughly happy if you would do me the kindness of calling me your friend. Cannot you make an effort in that direction? Do try. I know I am not a very attractive person, but one thing I swear to you, I am neither mean nor petty, and I am sure that, so far, I have never willingly done a shabby action. Of course, those qualities are not much to boast of, but they are all I possess, so I enumerate them, and I do so want a friend—oh! I do so want a friend."

At these words Lady Martinworth suddenly hid her face in her hands and burst into a flood of tears.

Pearl began to think there was to be no end to the surprises of that day. Now, behold! as a climax to every excitement, Lady Martinworth, succumbing, like any other member of her sex, to an hysterical attack of nerves. It was this womanly, weak action that conquered Pearl, and if Lady Martinworth had but known it, she could not have chosen better tactics to have achieved her ends.

Pearl understood that in spite of those mannish ways and the abrupt speech, in spite of the general roughness and uncouthness, in spite of all these outward traits that on ordinary occasions would have gone so far towards repelling a gentle nature

such as her own, that nevertheless she had there, seated in her house in the abandonment of grief, a friendless, miserable woman, with a woman's heart and a woman's weakness. Realizing this, Pearl kissed her and put her arms about her, as only a woman knows how to kiss and soothe, and comfort another of her sex.

Half an hour later, a grateful and transformed Lady Martinworth departed from Mrs. Nugent's house, and Pearl was left once more to her thoughts. Poor Pearl! they could hardly be reckoned pleasant thoughts. She perfectly well understood that she was being entangled in a net, that net of circumstances which is oft-times so strangely and so strongly woven that to the unfortunate victim entrapped within there appears no possible loophole of escape.

She thought of this interview just past, and asked herself where would it lead her? An hour ago she considered herself the natural enemy of the wife of the man she loved. Now, to her bewilderment, she found she had vowed eternal friendship and protection to this woman, who in the usual order of things, according to all natural laws, she ought to treat, if not with great dislike, certainly with fear, avoidance and distrust.

And yet, strange to say, she did not in the least regret her action, for she pitied with all her heart

the woman who in such a genuine outburst of grief, had prayed for her friendship. All the chivalry of Pearl's generous nature was aroused when she thought of this poor, friendless, heart-broken woman crying to her for help—to her who, from Lady Martinworth's own confession, was still the sole recipient of Dick Martinworth's love. Lady Martinworth had thrown herself, as it were, on her protection, and Pearl then and there vowed to herself, that as far as it lay in her power, as far as strength would be given her to carry out her intentions, she would not prove her false.

She had she knew well, a difficult task before her, and she did not disguise from herself the fact that in this matter there would be not only herself, not only her own strength, her own endurance to be reckoned with, but Martinworth, from whom she had fled, and who was here once more on the spot. He knew his power, and he would surely use it. Of that she had no doubt. Her dread of that power, of that determination of will, was as great now as had been the case in former years. After all,—as she had written of herself in her farewell letter at that time,—she was but a woman—a helpless, loving woman, weak and frail. On that occasion, when she had thought, rightly or wrongly, her disappearance was for his benefit, her love had given her the

almost superhuman strength to fly from him. Now she had only herself to think of, and one other forlorn woman—a stranger,—who had prayed to her for help. Could she hope to be given a second time the power to resist his undeniable influence over her? Could she resist his importunities,—his prayers? He was so strong, so very strong, and she was so loving, so lonely, and so weak.

Again the bell rang. This time it was Lord Martinworth who entered the room, and with his arrival, Pearl knew that her resolutions, her force of will, would be put straightway to the test.

CHAPTER VII.

TRIED AS BY FIRE.

There are moments in one's career when one knows as clearly as if written in letters of fire that one's whole future may depend on an action or a word. Both may appear insignificant enough in themselves, and yet that one little action, that one little word, may be all-sufficient to make or mar a life.

Pearl was fully aware of this fact as she saw Lord Martinworth with outstretched hands, his face and eyes all aglow, coming towards her. The moment was portentous! Her first instinct was to greet him with all the pent-up feelings of years, and to throw herself into his arms; but realizing how greatly everything depended on her self-control, she took refuge in silence and inaction, and shrinking back behind her chair, she waited with down-cast eyes for him to speak.

Lord Martinworth did not appear to resent her silence, or to notice the fear and unrest of her movement. The chair acted as no barrier to his impetuosity, and brushing it aside he seized her two hands and kept them within his own.

"At last, Pearl," he said in a low voice, "at last I have found you."

She did not reply, but slowly raising her eyes to his, gazed long and steadily into his face.

What she saw was a man approaching middle age, with lined face and saddened eyes, and *not* the Martinworth whom she had known.

She had left behind her a man with dark hair, frank and laughing blue eyes, and a mobile and expressive mouth. He whom she saw before her now had hair thickly sprinkled with grey, his eyes, blue as in days of yore, laughed no longer, but gleamed mournfully and somewhat wildly from beneath the finely marked eyebrows, while the beauty of the well shaped mouth was marred by certain hard and scornful lines that surrounded the slightly parted lips. His very figure seemed altered. He was a tall man, and had formerly been remarkable for his erect carriage. Now there was a stoop in the shoulders, and in spite of the well-cut frock coat, his stature seemed to Pearl to have decreased.

All these outward examples of change, these slight signs of degeneration, struck Pearl with a sudden chill. She let her eyes rest on the man before her, feeling as if she were in the presence of a stranger.

"Why do you not speak to me?" he asked at last. "Have you no word of welcome for me, Pearl?"

"I do not seem to know you," answered Pearl sadly, as she withdrew her hands from his. "You are changed, very changed. You are not the Dick Martinworth I remember."

"You find me changed? Doubtless I am. Well! I will credit you with believing that it does not give you much pleasure to look at a wretched, a broken-hearted man. To gaze at your own handiwork," he answered bitterly.

"My handiwork?" faltered Pearl.

"Yes, your handiwork. Listen, Pearl! God knows I did not come here with the intention of reproaching you, but nevertheless I must tell you a little of the harm that you have done. The man who loved his occupations and enjoyed all that life had to give him, now has taste for none of these things, but on the contrary is possessed, —poor soul,—with the demon of perpetual unrest. The man who had a certain faith in purity and truth, and was not otherwise than happy in that faith, now doubts whether such things really exist. And yet, Pearl, I did believe in goodness and in truth, for I believed in *you*. You left me, after years of waiting and of longing, left me at the moment I thought my dearest hopes were to be realised. You threw me a letter and left me,— and in so doing you have ruined my life. Yes, you have ruined my future and my life."

As Martinworth was speaking, his eyes grew

larger and wilder, and Pearl shrank back further behind the chair.

"I did it for the best," she murmured in a smothered voice, "Dick, I did it for your sake."

He took a step towards her, and clasped her by the wrist.

"Oh, Pearl! You dare to stand there and to tell me that lie. You tell me you did it for my sake, when you know it was only of yourself, it was only of your own reputation, your own good name, you were thinking. I'm not a fool, Pearl, whatever you may think me, and it was easy enough to read through the falseness, the hypocrisy of that letter you wrote me. Why, during all those years we knew and loved each other, were you not always considering, always fearful of what the world—your little mean world—would say? And it was just because you drew your own conclusions as to what would be the verdict of that world if you married me, that without one word of warning, you left me. And you tell me now you did it for the best, that you did it for my sake. May God forgive you!" and walking to the chimney-piece Martinworth buried his face in his hands.

Pearl was very pale as she came and stood before him.

"And you believe *that*," she said—"you believe that of *me*? You are actually capable of believing

that I, whom you loved all those years, and who, despite your present accusations, in spite of that overwhelming fear of the world's opinion you speak of, you well know, braved that world many and many a time for your sake. You are capable of believing that I, who already had sacrificed so much for you, could lie to you—lie to you at such a supreme moment? If such is the case, Lord Martinworth, I feel, that whatever may have been the motive at the time, the mean, interested one that you lay to my charge, or the single-hearted one of self-sacrifice, which before God I swear it was, whatever I repeat, may have been the motive —I bless Heaven for the instinct that prompted me to leave you. The man who can harbour such a thought of the woman he professes to love, is only worthy to be despised and scorned, as I despise and scorn you now!"

Martinworth had evidently not expected this furious onslaught. His face expressed the utmost astonishment, the utmost dismay.

"Pearl—Pearl," he cried, "calm yourself, I pray you. What are you calling me? What are you saying? If I have wronged you——"

"Wronged me," she interrupted, as she cast the hand away that he had stretched towards her, "you have not only wronged me, but you have insulted me with the injustice of such mean, such paltry thoughts. Oh, leave me. Why have you

come here to disturb me? I have been happy enough these last three forgetting years. Leave me, I implore you. You are married. Go back to your wife, to the wife who loves you, and leave me in peace."

Martinworth looked up with a strange light in his eyes. "My wife?" he said, "what has *she* got to do in this matter? Have you seen her?"

"Yes, she has been here. Go back to her. Go back and leave me. This interview is most distressing to me. It is painful to us both. It were surely best to end it? Perhaps later on we may be calmer, and able to meet without mutual reproaches, mutual regrets. Now we are both of us angry and bitter. Oh! how could you say those things of me? I beg you to go. I can never, never forget what you have just said. Go. Dick—go!"

Tears stood in her eyes, as she held out her hand as a token of farewell. Martinworth took it and kept it within his own. His face had become softer as she was speaking, and Pearl at last realised, as he gazed fixedly at her, with the well-known devoted look of old, that standing before her was indeed the Dick Martinworth she had always loved. The colour flew into her cheeks, and her heart beat as once again she felt his touch, the contact of his hand, and her thoughts went back to scenes and days gone-by. He was looking at her

with those beautiful eyes of his. They had lost their wildness now, and were gazing down into hers, with a world of regret, of tenderness, and of sorrow in their depths.

"Sit down," he said, quietly, "I wish to speak to you, Pearl, before I go. You must listen to me dear."

She let him press her gently back into a low chair, and he knelt down beside her, taking her two hands in his. He heard her heart throbbing, and before she knew what he was premeditating, he leant forward and kissed her lips. Pearl closed her eyes, as for one brief moment her head rested on his shoulder, and his lips clung to hers. Then she pushed him from her, and rose from her chair.

"Ah, leave me, Dick!" she cried. "What are you premeditating? What are you doing? Do not take hold of me any more. Do not kiss me again. Do not touch me—but leave me—leave me."

He had sprung to his feet.

"I cannot leave you," he said. "I have loved you so long, Pearl. I lost you, I have found you, and do you think I can leave you now? I can live no longer without you."

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried, "you must not love me now. I cannot forfeit my salvation even for you, Dick. Leave me—and never come back. I implore you, never come back again!"

"You tell me to go, Pearl, but you still care for me. I see it in your face, your eyes. I know you love me, as much as you have always loved me, and tell me what is salvation compared with our love? Our great absorbing love. Oh, come to me, my Pearl. I have waited for you so long, so very long, and have found you again after all these years. Though many and many a time I have railed against you, and even cursed you, Pearl, I have never ceased to love you, dear, to dream of you as mine. And now, once more we are together, and we must never be parted again, Pearl, my Pearl!"

He ceased, but the words still rang in her ears—We must never be parted again, Pearl, my Pearl! The sound intoxicated her. With beating heart, and eyes shining like stars, she went towards him. "Dick," she cried breathlessly, "I shall lose my soul for all eternity—I shall lose it now in spite of all my many years of fighting and of striving. But, after all, I am but a woman, and I love you. Yes! I love you. I long for you as much—ah! more—ah! more—than you have ever longed for me. I am only a woman, a poor, weak, tempted woman. What can I do against you, who are so strong? Therefore I come to you, my love—I come!"

She flew to his arms and he folded her within them. This time she gave him back kiss for kiss.

"Wait," she said a minute later, unclasping his arms from her neck, "wait a moment, and let me think."

"No, no, no," he cried, "you must not think; you must not wait to think. Come with me now. Come away from this place. Come with me, darling, where we can live forgotten and unknown."

She did not seem to hear him. She had walked towards the window, and was gazing out into the garden, where, round the shrubs and flowers, the twilight was quickly gathering. She stood there motionless for many minutes, it seemed to him, then she turned and faced him. Round the lips there was a look of great and stern resolve, though the eyes were softened by unshed tears.

"No," she said, "I have changed my mind. I will not—I will never go with you! My resolution must not—cannot—be altered. Dear Dick, I implore you to go, to leave me now, for I will not come between your wife and you. I have promised her."

"My wife!—my wife!—why drag in my wife again?" he cried. "What is she to you? What is she to me? I tell you, Pearl, she is nothing to me, and I am less than nothing to her. She goes her way and I go mine. She has her friends, I have mine. She is my wife only in name. And you compare this—this arrangement to the perfect

love that you and I have for each other,—to the devotion of years? You will let this wretched, this unnatural state of things stand between us? No, you shall not do so, Pearl! God knows I am accustomed enough to your—to women's moods. But a minute ago you said you would come with me, you were even willing to sacrifice your salvation for my sake. Why change now? You shall not change now. You are bound to me by your flight—by your word, by our love, by—by—everything, and, by God! you *shall* come."

And he caught her once more in his arms kissing her hands and face.

She wrenched herself free.

"Dick," she said, with eyes large with fear, and warding him off with her hands, "listen to me, I pray you. You are wrong about your wife, totally, entirely wrong. You may not love her, but she loves you, deeply, truly. Indeed she does. She wept to-day when she mentioned your name. I promised her, recklessly perhaps, that I would be her friend. It was a foolish, a rash promise, I know, but while I have breath in my body I intend to keep it. So go back to her, Dick. She loves you. Oh, Dick, in the old days you always listened to me. You always did what I desired. Once more I beg, I implore you to do so now, and to leave me."

"But to-day is not yesterday, and I will listen

no longer. You have fooled me too often, Pearl. You are free now, and you shall be mine for ever and ever. Do you hear? For ever and ever," and once again he was going towards her with outstretched arms, when he stopped abruptly in his approach.

The varied trials and excitements of the day had resulted in one termination, and that a natural one. Pearl's overstrained nerves at length gave way. With a cry like a wounded animal she threw herself on the sofa, her head buried in the cushions, sobbing in all the abandonment of grief and fear, while Lord Martinworth,—standing perfectly still,—watched her.

In the many years he had known and loved Pearl he had never seen her weep before. No, not even that time years ago, when she had bared her arm and shown him the bruises caused by her husband's blow. As he watched her now in bitter silence, he perceived perhaps for the first time, the terrible struggle between right and wrong that he had aroused, and a hitherto unknown feeling of utter contempt, complete abhorrence of self welled up within him. He knew now that he had conquered in the fight, that he had but to take her within his arms and she would be his, body and soul—his for ever. But the certainty of this knowledge brought him no triumph, no joy. For once he saw himself as he was, and the

inequality of the contest, the self-acknowledged cowardice of his present conduct, brought a flush of humiliation and of shame to his cheeks. He stood for a moment hesitating as he watched the quivering form and listened to the stifled sobs. He took one step towards her. He gently touched her hair. Then he paused, and with a parting glance revealing both grief and remorse, without a word he turned and fled.

And Pearl, lying there with her head buried in the cushions, heard the door close, the retreating footsteps, and the noise of the carriage driving away, and then, but only then, she understood that she had banished him for all eternity. She rushed to the open window, and cried to him in a voice sharp with agony ; but the occupant of the carriage was far beyond the sound of her call, and once more she threw herself on the sofa and hid her face in her hands.

"What have I done?" she cried aloud. "I have sent him away—I have sent him away. Oh! what made me do it? How could I do this thing? What do I care for duty and honour? And his wife—what is she to me? What right had she to exact such a promise from me? Why should I be her friend? She is my enemy, not my friend. And her husband, my love, my only love, I have sent away, I have sent away."

Thus Pearl raved while the night closed in upon

her. And yet that evening as she knelt by her bedside this prayer was uttered in all sincerity from the depths of her heart:—

"Oh God," she prayed, "keep him away from me, for I am very weak and he is strong. Keep him from me—keep him from me."

For two days, morning, noon, and night, that prayer was offered up to the throne of Heaven. The third day and the fourth it passed her lips haltingly but once. The fifth, sixth, and seventh days it was uttered no more.

Hardly a week had gone by, when one morning, with a racking head and trembling fingers, Pearl sat herself down by her writing table. She did not hesitate as she took the pen and wrote these words:—

"My heart's darling:

"I know now what I have done. I have sent you away. You whom I love and have ever loved. Come back to me. Come to me after dinner to-night, and I will teach you what a woman's sacrifice, a woman's love can be."

"PEARL."

CHAPTER VIII.

AMY TO THE RESCUE.

"Pearl, what is the matter with you?"

This question was asked sharply by Mrs Rawlinson, as she scrutinised her cousin's face with her quick eyes.

"Matter? Oh, nothing," answered Pearl flushing under the examination.

"Nonsense, my dear! Haven't I known you from babyhood? And for you to sit there and tell me that you are in your usual equable state of mind is simply ridiculous. I haven't seen you for a week. Not since the Cherry party. You have not condescended to come to my house, and each time I have come to yours I have been told that you were out, and, what is more, have had the door calmly shut in my face by that extremely impertinent 'boy' of yours. Amy tells me she has met with the same fate. May I ask the reason of this strange behaviour?"

"Certainly," replied Pearl, calmly. "You may ask what you like, but I don't fancy the reply will enlighten you much. I was busy saying my prayers."

Mrs. Rawlinson stared, as well she might, at this unexpected answer to her question.

Pearl laughed nervously at the expression on her cousin's face.

"Oh, you need have no fear for the state of my brain," she replied. "I have finished now. I prayed for the last time yesterday evening."

"Pearl," replied Mrs. Rawlinson gravely, as she rose and began fastening her cloak. "I don't understand you in this flippant mood. I have never known you to joke about sacred subjects before, and I can't imagine what possesses you now. Your looks, too, have changed. You seem to have grown quite thin in a week. Your eyes are shining, and your cheeks have two red spots on them. What is the meaning of all this?"

Pearl looked impatiently at the clock, an action which as she intended, was not lost on her cousin.

"You are going out?" she said; "well, good-bye. We shall meet at the Prime Minister's ball to-night, I suppose, and then dearest, you will have plenty of time as you do not dance, to tell me what is troubling you."

"Pearl gave a sigh of relief as the door closed behind Mrs. Rawlinson.

"Oh, these relations!" she ejaculated. "Much as we may love and appreciate them on ordinary

occasions, how utterly wearisome and *de trop* they prove themselves at certain moments of one's existence."

Once more she glanced at the clock, noticing that the hands pointed to half-past five.

"Three hours and a half more," she sighed, as, for the twentieth time that day, she drew from her pocket Martinworth's passionate reply to her summons. "How shall I ever get through them?"

At a quarter to nine that evening, just as Amy Mendovy was rising from the table, with the intention of dressing for one of the events of the spring—the Prime Minister's ball—a note from Mrs. Nugent was put into her hands.

"Dearest Amy," it ran, "As you love me,
"come to me immediately on receipt of this
"line. I am in great trouble, and in dire
"need of you. Give up the ball for my sake,
"and come to me, I implore you. Yours,
"PEARL."
"P.S.—I am not ill."

Amy's face clouded. What! give up the ball! This ball on which she had so greatly reckoned for the sole reason that she knew Sir Ralph would be present? She had long ago decided in her own mind that this was to be the occasion on which might be expressed, without loss of self-

respect, a reasonable amount of contrition and regret. There were moments when Amy flattered herself that she knew her power well enough to be fairly certain that she had only to offer the olive branch to see it promptly accepted. And yet again, at other times, she felt considerable doubt as to her advances being well received. Sir Ralph's conduct of late had certainly not held out much promise of success. She had not seen him since the garden party, and her vanity suffered more than one wound as the disagreeable conviction slowly dawned upon her—that he was persistently keeping out of her way. From all sides she heard of his devoted attendance upon Lady Martinworth. Though Amy had more than once seen this lady she did not know her. In moments of depression therefore, she found herself picturing her rival as the owner—if not of beauty—of much fascination and every charm, coupled with those powerful weapons, a clever woman's designing and seductive wiles.

Lady Martinworth would have been the first to have felt intense amusement at such gifted and extremely unlikely traits of character being attributed to her.

Poor Amy was therefore, somewhat perplexed and annoyed, and at times she felt extremely sorry for herself. She concluded that she had already been more than amply punished for those few

bars played so thoughtlessly on the piano, and sometimes she declared to herself that it was an imperative necessity to end the present unsettled situation. These last few weeks of uncertainty had taught her, more than all the previous months put together, how true and sincere was her love for Ralph Nicholson. She could only pray now that her own foolish conduct had not for ever put it out of her power to prove this fact to him.

The ball, she knew, would settle matters one way or the other, and it was with a feverish anxiety, very unlike the usual indifferent *insouciante* Amy, that she awaited the evening's event.

And now the receipt of this frantic little note upset all her calculations, destroying at one blow all her brilliant castles in the air. She hesitated. Pearl herself wrote she was not ill. What reason strong enough could therefore exist to cause Amy to relinquish this entertainment, an entertainment where so much that was momentous might occur. Her absence from the ball would cause Sir Ralph to doubtlessly put a wrong construction upon her action, and as he never came to see her now, when should she have another chance of explaining matters to him? No, she would not go to Pearl. It was really asking too much. She could not give up this opportunity, even for her cousin for whom her affection was so great. But the moment that Amy arrived at this deter-

mination, and as she read the note again, she realised that this was no childish whim on Pearl's part, that her presence for some reason unknown was necessary to her cousin, and such being the case, her own wishes, her own inclinations, must certainly be ignored.

There was a suspicion of tears in her eyes as, putting the note into her pocket, she rose from the table and looked across at her aunt.

"Auntie," she said, "I am sorry, but I can't go to the ball to-night. You and Uncle must go without me."

"What's this nonsense?" growled Mr. Rawlinson. "What business have your aunt and I skipping about at balls? We are both too old to make fools of ourselves. Our object in going is simply to look after you, and if you choose to take a ridiculous whim into your head to stay at home, why, we stay at home too, that's all."

And with a look on his face that expressed: "Nothing in heaven or earth will tear me hence," Mr. Rawlinson settled himself by the fire and deliberately lit a cigar.

"I'm dreadfully sorry to have to give it up," replied Amy, as she went towards the door, "but Pearl wants me. She writes very pressingly, and though she says she is not ill, I feel I must go."

"How tiresome of Pearl!" exclaimed Mrs. Rawlinson, "and yet— though I have no doubt your

disappointment is very great, my dear—I think you are right to go to her. She seemed strangely unlike herself this afternoon when I was there, and I came away with the impression that she had something on her mind. If that's the case, I should have thought the best person to help her would be myself. But I certainly have no intention of being huffy with the poor child. Life is too short for such sillinesses. Go and cheer her up, Amy, and if you are not back by eleven, I shall know that you are spending the night there, and will give orders that the maid is to take over your things. Good night, my dear," she continued, embracing her niece, "take the carriage and send it back for me. Your uncle may stay at home smoking his horrid old cigar if he likes, but I, for one, certainly intend going to the ball. I should never look the dear Marquis and Marchioness in the face again if no member of the family were to put in an appearance to-night. There are occasions when it is absolutely necessary to sacrifice one's self on the altar of duty. This is one of them."

Amy exchanged a sly glance with Mr. Rawlinson as she left the room. They both knew Rosina.

As she entered Mrs. Nugent's drawing-room, Amy, glancing at the clock, noticed that it marked exactly half-past nine. Three-quarters of an hour

had therefore elapsed since she had first received the note summoning her.

"Am I in time?" she enquired breathlessly, as she went towards her cousin. She did not know why she asked such a question, unless it was that the expectant look on Pearl's face seemed to call for it.

Pearl was standing near the grand piano. She looked as if she had just risen from it, and her hand was pressed against her heart. Her tall figure was draped in a tea-gown of white chiffon and of silver embroidery, and her face, framed in its masses of auburn hair, was almost as colourless as the gown. The grey eyes were the only features that moved in this countenance that seemed carved in stone. They were restless and sorrowful—almost despairing—and Amy stopped short in her approach as their glance fell upon her.

Pearl, perceiving the look of frightened astonishment, turned away, and said in a low voice: "I thought—I thought when I heard the bell, that it was—that it was—some one else. But of course I at once remembered, Amy dear, that I had sent for you. It is good of you, very good of you to give up the ball—and to come to me."

Amy went up to her cousin and put her arms round her.

"Of course I came," she said. "You wrote that you were in need of me, and I see you are

right. What is it, darling? Whom were you expecting when you heard the bell?"

"Amy," Pearl said excitedly, clasping her tighter to her, "promise me that you will stay by me—close by me all the time—with your arms about me, as they are now. They are so strong, these arms of yours. I feel so safe with them around me, and with your honest eyes looking at me, Amy. You will stay and sleep with me to-night, will you not? You will not leave me a minute—until—until—until——" she hesitated.

"No, Pearl, I will not leave you," answered Amy. "Of course I will stay the night, if you wish it. Come, let us sit on the sofa. I will keep my arms around you, and you shall tell me how I can help you. Come, darling, lay your head on my shoulder—so, and tell me what is distressing you. What do you fear?"

"No—no—Amy, I cannot—I dare not tell you. But you will see—you will understand shortly, very shortly—in a minute—two minutes. You will know, and then you will want to leave me. But you will not—you must not, Amy. Promise me you will not leave me. Whatever you may see, whatever you may hear, promise me you will stay to-night."

"Calm yourself, Pearl. I have already promised. Have I not come to be near you? Hark! there is the bell."

The two women rose instinctively to their feet, with their arms around each other's waists, their eyes fixed upon the door.

Amy had caught Pearl's excitement. She felt as if her nerves were strung on wires while waiting for the door to open. Her sense of hearing seemed intensified, as first she heard the front door open and close, then the slight sounds connected with an arrival, and lastly, the Japanese 'boy's' shuffling gait, followed by the quick, firm footsteps of a man.

It seemed a century to both women before the door finally opened. At length, however, the handle turned, and Lord Martinworth stood upon the threshold! He took one step forward. In his eyes was a glad light, and round his lips a smile. But he ventured no farther into the room. His face changed as if by magic. He seemed rooted to the spot, his eyes resting on the two women with their terrified faces, clasped in each other's arms. Perfect silence reigned in the room as the three stood motionless, staring into each other's eyes. Amy, half supporting Pearl, felt her form quivering in her arms, and observing the pallor of her face feared she was about to lose consciousness.

She led her cousin to the sofa, then went towards Martinworth.

"Pardon me, Lord Martinworth," she said,

bowing slightly, "I see my cousin is not in a fit state to go through the form of introduction. I am Miss Mendovy, and I know who you are, for you were pointed out to me at the garden party. My cousin is not well, and she—she sent for me. I had just arrived when you came. Will—will you not sit down?"

It was in a state of desperation that Amy made this commonplace request. If she had followed her inclinations she would have shrieked aloud—"For God's sake, go! Don't you understand that every moment you are standing here is torture to this woman?"

But Lord Martinworth did not seem to hear either the request or the words that preceded it. He remained motionless, like one paralysed, staring at Pearl, who, with ashen face and closed eyes, was lying back on the sofa in a state of semi-collapse.

In that moment he realised to the full all that she had experienced before and since she had sent him that letter of summons. For the first time in his life he understood, through what a deadly conflict must pass a woman who by nature is virtuous and chaste, before she casts honour, and purity, and self-respect to the winds. Strange to say, he forgot himself—his own bitter humiliation and disappointment. He forgot the rapture he had felt on receiving her summons, and the

despair and rage that had taken its place when his eyes first alighted on the shrinking form, sheltered in the girl's arms. He forgot all the varied, conflicting emotions that had taken possession of him since his entrance into Pearl's drawing room, and, as his eyes remained fixed on the shame-stricken woman before him, he found himself thinking only of her.

Once before, in this same room, when he had watched her weeping on that same sofa, he had partially divined what suffering this woman, whom he loved, and for whom at that moment he would gladly have given his life, was undergoing. But it was only now, seeing her before him almost senseless with grief and shame, that the full magnitude of the torture she was enduring flashed upon him. He watched her there, breathing hard, without a trace of colour in her cheeks, and with her hands pressed against her heart, and his whole being went out in pity to her. And, mingled with the pity, was a feeling of admiration—almost of veneration. He realised to the full that the hesitation, the faltering weakness had reached a climax, that her better self had conquered, and though crushed for the moment, he saw her rising triumphant from the struggle, a nobler and a stronger woman.

How long he stood there, watching that shrinking form—troubled, turbulent thoughts following

each other in quick rapidity through his brain—Martinworth never knew. He did not feel the girl's antagonistic yet enquiring eyes upon him, indeed, he was indifferent to, almost unconscious of her presence. He knew that he was bidding adieu, an eternal adieu, to this the only love of his life. He felt none of the bitterness, or unreasonable anger that had assailed him when Pearl, with such determination, left him three years before, for, judging now by his own sentiments, he knew that what she had then written was indeed the truth—that in her renunciation of him she had sacrificed herself and her love for his sake. But he would show her that he also could be prompt in this spirit of self-sacrifice. He would prove his love by leaving her, and she would thus learn and appreciate that, erring man though he was, he also could renounce, he also could be strong.

Yes! he would bid adieu to her now. The love, the passion of years would, he knew well, remain with him till the grave, but—he swore to himself—never again, by word or by action, would he raise that look of agony and of shame upon Pearl Nugent's face.

He took a step towards her, and, kneeling beside her sofa, he lifted the hand hanging listlessly down, and pressed it between his own.

"Good-bye," he said, "I am leaving you, dear.

You have conquered once again, Pearl. You have always conquered. The struggle has been very great, harder than ever this time, but once more you have chosen the right. You would always do right in the end. So loving you as much as I venerate you, Pearl, I leave you, dear. From me you have nothing more to fear. I ask your forgiveness for the suffering I have caused you," and raising to his lips the hand which he still held, he kissed it once—twice, and waiting for no reply, looking neither to the right nor to the left, Lord Martinworth walked towards the door.

Pearl Nugent half rose on her sofa. She watched with wide-open, miserable eyes. Then let him go without a word.

The hall door closed. For a long time neither of the women spoke. Amy glanced once more at the clock, and noticed that it wanted ten minutes to ten. Lord Martinworth had been in the room seven or eight minutes, and during that time Pearl had not once opened her lips.

It was, nevertheless, Mrs. Nugent who, arousing herself, broke the silence.

"You know now, Amy, why I wanted you," she said in a low, weak voice. "I thank God that you came, for you have saved me. You must not hate me, dear. I have been a very foolish, a very wicked woman. Perhaps I ought

not to have sent for you, a girl, and yet—and yet —you have saved me, Amy."

"My dear Pearl," replied Amy, smiling through her tears, "don't get tragic, for goodness sake. We surely have had enough of that kind of thing. And it's nonsense about my having saved you, whatever you may mean by that. Of one thing I am certain, that my presence in your house this evening in no wise affected Lord Martinworth's conduct. He would have acted in precisely the same manner if I had not been here. The man is a gentleman. Anyone can see that. Don't make any confidences, dear," she added, as Pearl was about to speak. "You are just in the mood to tell me all your secrets, and, believe me, you will only regret it later. So I will be magnanimous, and will refrain from asking you questions. Besides, you know, I am not a fool. I can guess a good deal, so my magnanimity is not so very tremendous after all. Now, dear, don't let us talk any more, but I will sing you something while you lie back and shut your eyes."

Amy strolled towards the piano, and, placing her hands on the keys, watched Pearl from under her long eyelashes. Neither her soothing presence, nor the sweetest lullaby she could think of, seemed however, at first to have much effect upon her cousin's excited nerves. Pearl walked restlessly up and down the room, trailing her white dress

behind her, with sad eyes shining feverishly from out the still whiter face, looking like a troubled spirit from another world.

For some time she continued pacing the room. Then, as if struck with a sudden idea, she unlocked a drawer of her writing-table, extracted from some hidden recess Martinworth's reply to her letter, read it deliberately through, tore it into a hundred pieces, and cast it into the flames. She watched it burn until nothing but the blackened ashes remained. At length, with a sigh of exhaustion, she stretched herself once more on the sofa, and ere long Amy had the satisfaction of perceiving the eyelids droop, and the weary and worn-out Pearl fall into a dreamless slumber.

Amy continued playing low strains of music for some time longer. Then she rose noiselessly, and seated herself near Pearl. For over an hour Amy sat silent and motionless watching the sorrowful and beautiful face, on the cheeks of which traces of tears still remained.

And as she watched, hardly daring to breathe for fear of rousing the sleeper, her thoughts dwelt on many matters connected with Pearl. The full details of the divorce had been studiously kept from her, but Amy would not have been a modern young lady if she had not been acquainted with a good deal more than her elders gave her the credit of knowing. She was perfectly aware that Pearl

had run away from some man who had been mixed up in her case, and who had wanted to marry her, and though she had never heard his name, by the simple process of putting two and two together, it was not difficult to divine that the man concerned was Lord Martinworth.

"How he adores her," thought Amy. "What a pity she did not marry him, instead of throwing him into the clutches of that awful woman."

For, with the harshness of youth, it was thus that Miss Mendovy designated Lord Martinworth's wife. Her imagination pictured "that awful woman" whirling in the giddy waltz with Sir Ralph Nicholson, while big tears of disappointment clouded her pretty eyes. She wondered if her act of self-sacrifice had been wasted or the reverse. But even as she debated this question in her own mind, she recalled once more the look of triumphant anticipation on Martinworth's face as he entered the room that evening, contrasting so painfully with Pearl's expression of shame, her action of shrinking terror. The remembrance of these two faces at that portentous moment were imprinted vividly on her brain. And Amy knew that it was needless to doubt any longer. Her question was answered.

CHAPTER IX.

On the Verge of the Unknown.

The exaltation, indecision, and agony of mind experienced by Pearl for the last fortnight culminated in a general breakdown.

Towards dawn of the next day Amy, sleeping in the adjoining room, was roused from slumber by sounds of talking in Pearl's apartment. The walls of Tokyo houses are proverbially thin, even those constructed on European principles, and as Pearl was talking loud, every word she said could easily be overheard. A short time sufficed to rouse Amy from her bed, and in a minute she was in the next room. There to her horror she found Pearl in night attire, with wide-open staring eyes, her glorious hair streaming down her back, pacing frantically up and down the room, uttering muttered sounds and incoherent words and exclamations.

Amy was genuinely terrified at the appearance of those wild eyes and flushed cheeks, at the smothered cries and the constant stream of senseless words. All her attempts to calm her cousin and to lead her back to bed proving

fruitless, she lost no time in awakening the household, and ere long she was in telephonic communication with both Mrs. Rawlinson and the nearest doctor.

Before the arrival of these persons, Amy had however, succeeded in persuading Pearl to return to bed, where, with the help of the terrified *amahs*,* and by holding her down by main force, she had so far managed to keep her. No prayers or entreaties however, seemed to have the slightest effect on the distracted mind, or soothing movements to influence the restless body.

It did not take long for the doctor to make his diagnosis. A sudden and acute attack of brain-fever was the verdict.

"Mrs. Nugent must have passed through some great and unexpected shock or struggle to have undergone such a sudden and complete collapse," he gravely remarked. "I must ask to be allowed to call in Dr. Takayama in consultation. I find it impossible to say how the malady may turn."

And then followed days and nights, aye, weeks of anxious watching. For long, not only Pearl's reason but life itself was despaired of. Terrible was the consternation caused by this news among the many who loved and admired, and even those who at one time may have disliked and envied the beautiful Mrs. Nugent. Her magnificent hair

* Maids.

was sacrificed. Amy wept hot tears as she watched the scissors performing their ruthless task. She gathered the thick masses up in her arms, and separating one glossy auburn lock from the rest, enclosed it in an envelope. The direction bore the name of Lord Martinworth, and on the note paper that surrounded the tress were scribbled these five words:—"She is very ill—dying."

But that note was fated never to be forwarded to its destination. Amy's impulses, though generally erring on the side of generosity and good nature, were frequently, for this very reason, unwise. On the rare occasions, however, that she gave herself time to consider, she seldom did a foolish thing. A trifling incident prevented her sending the communication and its enclosure that day, and the next saw it safely committed to the recesses of a drawer, from which it was only extracted several months later, under circumstances that brought back many a vivid and painful memory.

'It is an ill wind that blows no one any good.' Pearl's dangerous illness had at least one beneficial and unexpected result—that of proving the means of an ultimate meeting and a complete reconciliation between Amy and Ralph Nicholson. Not a day passed without the latter calling to inquire after Pearl. Amy however, busy with her aunt in the sick room, had never chanced to see

him, and it was only when Pearl's illness had lasted almost a month, and the doctors had lifted the awful weight from their minds by at last finding a slight improvement in her condition, that an encounter between the two at length took place.

Mrs. Rawlinson had sent Amy out into the garden for a breath of fresh air, and the girl was seated under the shade of the great stone lantern by the side of the miniature lake, watching the gold fish darting in and out among the rocks, and pondering sadly over the distress and the gnawing anxiety of the past weeks. Great tears were flowing down her cheeks, which were pale and drawn. She fixed her eyes on Fujiyama, hazy and indistinct in the afternoon sun, and she wondered mournfully whether poor Pearl would ever gaze at her beloved mountain again. There was one little fleecy cloud hovering over the summit. It was snowy white, with a silver edge, and Amy found herself dreamily comparing this mystical, almost transparent cloud to Pearl's pure, unsullied soul. Her eyelids drooped. She wondered and wept no more, for Amy slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

It was fully an hour later when she opened her eyes to find Ralph Nicholson standing by her side.

"Poor little thing," he said sorrowfully, as she started up from her chair, "how sad, how weary

you look. Go to sleep again. I will leave you. But first tell me, how is she to-day?"

Amy brushed away the tears that were still wet on her eyelids.

"The doctors see a slight improvement," she replied. "The fever is, they say, a shade lower. But she seems no better to auntie and myself. Oh! Sir Ralph, I am sure she will die. She cannot resist. It has been going on so long now. She is still delirious at times, and I know the fever is gradually but surely wearing her away."

Ralph looked at the sweet face, on which all the joy and sparkle had died out, and on which grief for the time being had made such havoc. And as he looked, he knew that he had never admired, that he had never loved Amy Mendovy as he admired and loved her to-day in this soft and saddened mood.

He sat down on the grass beside her chair and took her hand between his own.

Amy did not withdraw it.

"Amy, dear," he said very quietly, "I cannot tell you how unhappy I am. It is awful to me to see your grief, for, as you know—you know it well Amy, though you never would listen to me—I love you, and have loved you for long, darling. May I share your trouble with you, Amy? May I help you to bear it a little? Will you be kind

to me, and after my long waiting give me the right to do this?"

Amy never quite knew how it occurred, but shortly after this request she found her head leaning on Ralph's shoulder, while that individual was busily employed in kissing away the tears—tears whether now of joy or of sorrow,—it was somewhat difficult to tell.

But Amy would not have been a woman, and certainly not Amy Mendovy, if before her lover left her that day, she had not satisfied herself as to the future disposal of the lady whom she chose to consider as her rival.

"And Lady Martinworth?" she inquired, "what are you going to do about her? You will, I suppose, be kind enough to stop going about with her and flirting, now that you have at last made up your mind to be engaged to me. Oh! Ralph, you don't care for her really, do you?"

Ralph laughed and twirled his black moustache, as he looked down into the flushed face.

"Nobody," he replied, "has ever yet accused me of ingratitude. I certainly have no intention of casting off Lady Martinworth, for she has done me an uncommonly good turn."

"What do you mean?" inquired Amy, on the defensive at once.

"Simply that my flirtation, not that it deserves

such a name—for Lady Martinworth, let me tell you, darling, hasn't got the remotest notion as to what flirting means—our—late—intercourse, was nothing more nor less than a pre-arranged plan formed with Mrs. Nugent to produce the desired result of bringing you, Miss Mendovy, to your senses. I couldn't have got on much longer without you, you know. So we had to contrive some means by which you should learn to know your own mind. It was Mrs. Nugent's happy notion that I should try to make you jealous, Amy. She is ill now, so you must forgive her, you know. And as for me, I don't care if you forgive me or not, for now that you have once said 'yes,' you won't find it very easy to get rid of me again. I can tell you that."

Of course, Amy wasted a good deal of breath in pointing out that she had never for a single instant experienced the sentiment of jealousy, a sentiment for which, she assured him, she had indeed the very greatest contempt. She took some little trouble to explain that she had merely felt considerable regret that Ralph should have—well—caused gossip, by allowing his name to be coupled with that of a married woman. In fact, she begged he would understand that her anxiety from the first had been solely for the condition of his morals, and she seized this opportunity to deliver quite an eloquent little homily on the

iniquity of flirtations in general, and with married women in particular. To all of which words of wisdom Ralph listened attentively, the effect, however, being somewhat marred, in Amy's opinion, by a persistent and most apparent twinkle in the dark eyes. She inwardly wondered if he could by any possibility be laughing at her, and she felt that she really had some right to be aggrieved, when, after her lecture, which had lasted fully five minutes, he merely said in reply that Lady Martinworth was a real good soul, and though he perfectly understood Amy being somewhat prejudiced against her for the moment, he had not the slightest doubt that eventually the two would become the closest of friends.

"She is the kindest-hearted, straightest woman I know," he added, "and she really has an awfully sad life. Martinworth doesn't care two straws for her. He is away now—went off weeks ago, and never offered to take her with him. She is terribly lonely, for she knows very few people here. I think you might take pity on her, darling, and chum up a bit with her."

Which tactless and unfortunate suggestion was met with the severity it deserved.

Miss Mendovy regretted, but she really did not think that she and Lady Martinworth were likely to prove congenial. From her childhood she had

possessed a strong dislike for mannish women. And though, of course, she could not but feel sorry for the poor thing's solitude, she really feared that just at present, with her mind and hands so full of dear Pearl, she would have but little spare time to devote to outsiders. This fact reminded Amy that it was impossible to waste further precious moments in talking about a person who really interested her so very slightly, so that if Ralph would excuse her, she would go and relieve her aunt in the sick room.

But Amy was not allowed to depart just yet. Sir Ralph was wise enough to see that he had—to use his own phraseology—"put his foot into it," and he mentally decided that, for the future, Lady Martinworth's name should figure as little as possible in his and Amy's conversations.

He promptly made up for lost time. And when Amy parted from him a quarter of an hour later the radiance of her face proved that, certainly for the time being, the fact that such an annoying person as Lady Martinworth existed was entirely obliterated from her mind.

Meanwhile, Sir Ralph Nicholson had spoken the truth when he announced that the lady discussed was an unhappy woman, though perhaps he would have been more accurate if he had contented himself by saying that she was an intensely bored woman. She hated Tokyo, and, for that

reason alone, she had been somewhat disappointed when her husband had started on his travels without her. As for his indifference to her companionship, she was too much accustomed to that state of things to greatly worry herself on that score. It was only on very rare occasions, such as the day when she had unbosomed herself to Pearl, that she would allow the fact of her husband's want of affection to distress her. "Harry" Martinworth was essentially practical, and if only she had been able to indulge in some amusement more or less congenial to her tastes to occupy her spare time, she would certainly never have troubled herself about what, by bitter experience, she knew to be the inevitable.

But here she was, planted down in a Tokyo hotel, with scarcely an acquaintance in the whole of Japan save Sir Ralph and the members of the English Legation. Art of any kind had no interest for her, the collecting of curios held out no inducement, and such scenery as had come under her notice she loudly declared was absurdly overrated. Later on, it was her ambition to climb Fuji-yama, Nantaisan, Asama-yama or any other mountain that might happen to come in her way, but as yet it was far too early in the year to think of such strenuous expeditions.

Meanwhile, there were two or three sights which Lady Martinworth concluded were really

worth her consideration—the game of polo, as it is played in Japan, the fencing, and the wrestling matches. Over the description of the latter she grew quite enthusiastic. The fact that these matches are not greatly patronised by the presence of ladies was alone sufficient to encourage Lady Martinworth in witnessing the performance as often as she could get a chance. She felt no disgust. On the contrary, she experienced intense admiration at the sight of these gigantic naked men, with their rolls of fat, and their huge muscles standing out like cords, and at each fresh feat of strength her enthusiasm increased. If all Japanese had been built on the same Herculean lines as the wrestlers, Lady Martinworth's admiration for the race would have been unbounded, but, as it was, for the natives generally her Ladyship expressed that contempt which to say the least is to be pitied as the outcome of ignorance, and of an insular and unenquiring mind.

She told Sir Ralph she could not see what there was in Japan to make such a fuss about. She launched into politics, and prophesied complete annihilation if the country ever went to war with Russia. If the Japanese were as enlightened and advanced as was said, why on earth hadn't they made decent golf-links in Tokyo? What could one think of a people who actually didnt know the meaning of the word "sport" in its

everyday sense. As for their women, it was positively laughable to think of them as never taking any form of exercise, merely contenting themselves by driving in 'rickshas with the hood up, or in carriages that were closed. On very rare occasions they did walk a few steps, she had been told, but then, was it not a dutiful and humble couple of yards behind the husband? Again, what possibly could be the charm of the Japanese woman for the European man was a mystery altogether beyond her comprehension. A soft, purring kitten of a creature who could only smile, acquiesce in everything, make gentle little phrases, and have pretty manners! Ralph ventured to remark that it was probably these very attributes, so unusual and so soothing, that proved their undoubted fascination and their charm. But at this assertion he was met with such a stony stare of amazement that he reddened. On the virtues and attractiveness of the Japanese woman, and the courage and perspicacity, the cleverness and far-seeing proclivities of the Japanese people generally, on which subjects Nicholson held the very strongest opinions, he, in all future discussions with Lady Martinworth, from henceforth held his peace.

As an amusement, therefore, Lady Martinworth's bicycle proved almost her only resource. Even there she was doomed to a certain amount

of disappointment, for she had not reckoned on the extreme variableness of the Japanese climate. It developed into a rainy spring. On certain days the roads in and around Tokyo were practically impassable, and this inconvenience increased her contempt for a nation whose Town Municipality was certainly at that time, permitted so completely to neglect its duties. A cloudless day, perfect in the brilliancy and clearness of its atmosphere, would however, put a temporary stop to her grumblings, and, seizing these rare opportunities, and commanding Sir Ralph to accompany her, Lady Martinworth would promptly don her bloomers, straightway sallying forth on a bicycle ride of many miles.

These expeditions, on the whole, suited Ralph's particular frame of mind, for they all took place before his engagement to Amy Mendovy. They would ride long distances without exchanging a word, which gave him plenty of time for reflection and for forming various projects and plans for the future, which, even at this time, he ventured to think, might possibly prove not altogether so absolutely despairing and hopeless. While resting themselves at some *chaya*, or tea house, or while seated beneath the shade of a knoll of pines, or within the shadows of a bamboo grove, in the seclusion of which nestled many a picturesque Buddhist or Shinto shrine, Ralph would lay himself

out to be agreeable to his companion. And, indeed, he found her capital company, and if the conversations did invariably turn on the subject of sport in some form or other, he was all the better pleased. For Ralph was a keen sportsman, and in "Harry" Martinworth, whose love for all kinds of out-door avocations was without affectation—and whose proficiency therein was indisputable—he found a genuine kindred spirit.

It was during one of these expeditions that he happened to mention the fact of his friend Mrs. Nugent's illness. He had not forgotten the Cherry party, nor the antagonistic and disdainful glances in which the ladies had indulged at the time, and consequently he had so far purposely avoided bringing Pearl's name into their conversations. One day, however, when poor Pearl was at her very worst, he proved such a dull companion—so pre-occupied, that Lady Martinworth's curiosity was aroused, and after some difficulty, she succeeded in extracting the reason of his persistent and melancholy silence.

To Ralph's surprise, his companion, on ascertaining the state of affairs, promptly turned her bicycle round, the only explanation she deigned to offer for this spasmodic movement being her intention of going forthwith to Mrs. Nugent's house to see what could be done for her.

"But I was not aware that you were acquainted

with her," was Ralph's remark, as they raced along homewards.

"Of course I know her. She is a dear friend of mine. You don't suppose that I'm going to let her die, do you, when I'm here on the spot and able to nurse her?"

Considering what he knew of the circumstances, it was perhaps not surprising that Nicholson should raise his eyebrows, smiling discreetly at what in this statement certainly somewhat savoured of exaggeration.

Lady Martinworth did not, however, vouchsafe any further explanation, but remained silent for the rest of their journey home.

True to her word, she bade adieu to Sir Ralph at the hotel, and cycled straight to Pearl's house, where she had considerable difficulty in making the "boy" understand, from her broken Japanese, her desire to see the patient, but finally succeeded in gaining admission to the drawing-room. She sent up her card, and after a certain length of time Mrs. Rawlinson made her appearance.

At the first glance the two women proved antagonistic. Indeed, in Rosina's case it was quite sufficient for a person to bear the detested name of Martinworth for her to buckle on her armour, acting at once on the defensive.

"I have come to see Mrs. Nugent," said Lady Martinworth abruptly. "Will you be so good as

to take me to her? I could not succeed in making that stupid servant understand that I wished to see her."

"The 'boy' was only obeying his orders," replied Mrs. Rawlinson brusquely, as her eyes travelled over the extraordinary figure before her. Lady Martinworth was still adorned in her cycling bloomers, and with her cropped head, man's shirt, and motor cap it was more difficult than ever to distinguish her from a member of the sterner sex. "He was told not to allow anyone into the house. My cousin, Mrs. Nugent, is permitted to see no one."

"But she sees you?"

"Surely, that is a totally different matter," replied Rosina coldly. "I am her cousin. My niece, Miss Mendovy, and I divide the nursing between us."

"Let me help you to nurse her. You may not know, Mrs. Rawlinson, but I am a certificated nurse. Taking up nursing was a mere whim, but nevertheless I was for some time nurse in the London Hospital. Do let me undertake her case?"

Rosina softened. "It is very good of you to propose such a thing, Lady Martinworth, and I appreciate the kindness of heart that prompts you to make the offer. But we have an excellent trained Japanese nurse to help us, and I could not

think of taking up your time. Besides—besides ——" Rosina paused, as, in spite of herself, her eyes once more became rivetted on the bloomers.

"Oh, well! of course, I shouldn't dream of nursing her in this rig-out, if that's what you mean by staring at my knickerbockers," exclaimed Lady Martinworth. "However, surely my garments are a mere matter of detail in such a question of vital importance. Let me be of some little use, Mrs. Rawlinson. Do let me assist in nursing your cousin. She has been very kind and good to me, and I have had so little kindness shown to me in my lifetime that I should like to do something to prove that I appreciate it, when it does happen to come in my way."

Lady Martinworth's offer was however, kindly but firmly declined. Rosina told Amy later, that when she saw the look of disappointment that overshadowed the plain countenance she found herself on the point of relenting. Perhaps, being naturally soft-hearted, she might have acceded in the end to Lady Martinworth's desire and have enlisted her aid. The incongruity of such a proceeding struck her, however, with particular force when she recalled to mind the former state of affairs between Mrs. Nugent and the lady's husband, and she remained firm in her refusal.

The proposal offered so frankly and naturally, though declined, nevertheless won Mrs. Rawlin-

son's heart, and during the rest of the visit there was a marked change in her manner. They parted quite good friends. And though Lady Martinworth was not allowed to undertake the duties of nurse, she showed her desire to be useful and kind in many other ways. Every morning a large basket of flowers would arrive from the hotel, "With Lady Martinworth's kind enquiries," and later on, during Pearl's convalescence, she would send every delicacy within the hotel cook's capability, and her visits to the patient became, as time went on, more and more frequent.

But at the period of Lady Martinworth's invasion there was no question of convalescence, and for many days both Pearl's life and her reason hung in the balance. But at length she took a slight turn for the better, her malady yielded to treatment, and her naturally strong constitution, conquering in the end, one day, shortly after Amy's engagement to Sir Ralph, she was pronounced by the physicians to be out of danger. It was, nevertheless, many, many weeks before Mrs. Nugent was allowed to be moved from her room. When at length she was lifted downstairs, absolute quiet and freedom from excitement were still prescribed. Indeed, the tranquillity insisted on appeared to be the culmination of Pearl's desires. She would lie on her sofa on the verandah silent for hours, her eyes fixed on the

beds of purple and snow-white irises bending their graceful heads in the gentle breeze, or on the distant view of Fujiyama, shadowy and dim in the hot June sun.

It was only after many days that Rosina ventured to bring up Lady Martinworth's name, and the eagerness of that lady to see her.

At the mention of that name, which recalled so much that she would fain forget, Pearl half rose on her sofa, and the cheeks, now so thin and pale, flushed.

"Is she alone?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes. Lord Martinworth is still away. He has been away over two months now, since the day that you were taken ill."

There was a pause as Pearl threw herself back wearily on to her cushions.

"I cannot see her," she said at length, "I am too weak. She—she is so jerky—so abrupt. She—she would fatigue me."

Mrs. Rawlinson did not press the point. But she was not greatly surprised when some days later Pearl after a long silence, quietly suggested that if Lady Martinworth called again, she would receive her.

Henceforth commenced a series of visits which eventually proved of great pleasure and of a certain amount of profit to both women. Lord Martinworth's name was by tacit consent never

mentioned, and when Pearl realised that no danger from that quarter was to be feared, she allowed herself to show genuine satisfaction at his wife's presence in her house.

It must be confessed Lady Martinworth deserved considerable credit for the tact and cleverness she exhibited in amusing the invalid. Greatly as both Rosina and Amy might wonder at this strange and unexpected friendship, they could not but feel grateful for each smile which the visitor, with her quaint and caustic remarks, would succeed in conjuring up on the pale, sad face.

But Lady Martinworth was not the only person admitted to Pearl's presence during this period of convalescence. De Güldenfeldt had returned from his travels at the very moment Mrs. Nugent's condition was considered the most critical, and he had hardly put foot in Tokyo before he was met with the news of her almost hopeless condition. This distressing information accomplished at one stroke what months of absence, of distraction, and of meditation had failed to do. Stanislas straightway forgot the fact that for long he had borne a bitter grudge against this woman, who had treated both him and his proposal with such calm and complete indifference. Not only all his love, but all his sympathies, all his fears for her safety, were aroused at this crushing news, and in

spite of the accumulation of work awaiting him on his return, he found he could put his mind to nothing while Mrs. Nugent's fate hung in the balance. He haunted the house, sitting for hours in the drawing-room alone, or pacing the garden, till Amy or Rosina taking pity on him, would steal a minute from their duties to inform him how the patient was progressing, or to give him the doctor's latest report.

It was during this miserable period that Rosina guessed his secret. Indeed, a child could have read it, for it was easy enough to divine, and de Güldenfeldt himself made next to no attempt to disguise his feelings. One day, in a specially despairing mood, he went so far as to hint to Mrs. Rawlinson what had passed between him and Pearl. He found a sympathetic listener, and consequently ended by confiding all those cherished hopes which had met with so unexpected and so disastrous a termination.

Like all large-hearted women, Rosina was somewhat of a matchmaker. At a glance she saw the many advantages that Pearl had thrown away in this refusal of Stanislas de Güldenfeldt's love and protection. Promptly she decided in her own mind that if her cousin should be spared, it would certainly not be her—Rosina Rawlinson's—fault if matters were not one day brought to an entirely satisfactory conclusion.

But now was not the time to think of such things. It was only later on, when Pearl was passing so many hours of enforced idleness on her sofa, that somehow it became a matter of course that Stanislas de Güldenfeldt should be found seated by her side, reading to her in his pleasant voice the latest books from Europe, or talking to her as only he could talk.

That Pearl found pleasure in his society was evident. She seemed to forget that anything of a painful nature had ever passed between them. Her face would brighten as his form appeared on the verandah, and she would greet him gladly with her soft voice. De Güldenfeldt would often wonder whether in the very smallest degree she understood, not only how blessed for him were those many hours spent thus by the side of her sofa, but likewise how intensely he dreaded the fatal moment when she would once more take up her everyday life, and when he consequently would necessarily be shifted to the conventional rank of the occasional afternoon visitor.

But those dreaded days still seemed a long way off. Meanwhile, Stanislas de Güldenfeldt sat during the whole of those sweet, summer afternoons in the presence of the woman he loved, drinking in the poison of her returning beauty, and dreaming dreams of untold happiness and content.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SHADOW OF A TOMB.

It was an early summer, and as Pearl's health was sufficiently restored to render her fit for travel, she was ordered by the doctors to leave Tokyo. By the end of June the heat became intense, and early in July she and the Rawlinson ladies departed for Nikko, *en route* for Chuzenji.

On the borders of the beautiful lake of Chuzenji, Pearl, following her cousin's example, had built herself, during the first year of her arrival, a small and picturesque Japanese house. She loved this charming spot, as all must learn to love it who have passed the summer months by the borders of its blue, rippling water, and beneath the shadows of its wooded mountains. Pearl was peculiarly susceptible to the influences of nature, and the summers already spent by her at Chuzenji had been principally employed in sailing her little boat on the lake, watching with keen delight the changing scenery, sometimes so dazzling in its sunlit verdure, at others, beneath its sudden storms, so sombre, terrible, and forbidding. Pearl knew the

lake under all its aspects, and from constant watching could foretell almost as well as a Japanese *sendo*,* the rapid transformations that metamorphosed in a few minutes the whole face of Nature. For it is a lake not only to be loved, but with its sudden rages, sweeping mists, and boundless, unknown depths, equally to be feared.

During a happy summer on the Thames many years before Martinworth had taught her how to manage and to sail a boat, and the knowledge of this art had proved one of Pearl's greatest pleasures during those calm, peaceful months, spent high in the Japanese hills. She would sail for hours in her little skiff, gazing with eyes full of mystery into the glittering blue expanse of sky and waters, while the perpendicular sides of the sacred mountain Nantai-san, black with the shadows of its impenetrable forests, stood like a giant sentinel among its lesser brethren, overshadowing, in its gloomy, threatening darkness, the glowing outer world.

But this year, before attempting the ascent to Chuzenji, it was thought advisable, on account of Pearl's health, to pause half way for some days at Nikko. The nights of this lovely mountain village were refreshingly cool and invigorating after the suffocating airlessness of the city, whilst during the lovely summer days Pearl and her

*Boatman.

cousins would wander through the romantic grounds of the Nikko temples, or seat themselves for hours by the borders of the river, watching its hurried rush over rocks and colossal boulders, which year after year, to the destruction of roads and bridges, are borne by resistless floods from the mountains above.

The trio of ladies had been but a few days at Nikko when they were joined by the Swedish Minister and Nicholson, Tokyo being found unbearably dull after the departure of their friends. Nikko, with its sparkling, verdure-bordered streams and cloudless sky, its fairylike and wooded glens, its avenues of great pine trees dusky in the gathering shadows of the night,—is an ideal spot for lovers. This fact Amy and Ralph were not long in discovering for themselves, and from the day that the latter joined them, Mrs. Rawlinson was permitted to see but next to nothing of her pretty niece, and with her usual good-temper, accepted the inevitable.

As for Pearl Nugent, she was at this moment passing through a period of transition, difficult to imagine and still more difficult to endure. She who for so long had devoted first her existence, and later on her thoughts to one sole object, awoke one day to find that all was transformed—that the dream was over, and that she loved no longer.

Needless to say, the awakening was a cruel one.

To her dismay, not only did she discover that this passion of her life, which till now had never even flickered, but had burned with an ever-steady glow, not only was this passion extinguished for ever,—but slowly and positively the fact dawned upon Pearl that the mere mention of the name of Martinworth was alone sufficient to give rise to a sentiment of shrinking terror, of breathless dismay, of overwhelming consternation and regret. She could not think of that fatal letter of summons, of his passionate reply to that letter, already expressive of immediate possession, of that conquering look of triumph on his face when he entered her room that eventful night,—without turning white with consuming shame, with misery and reproach.

She hated herself as she recalled those moments. And in hating herself she realised that slowly developing was an incipient feeling of dislike against the man who, however unwittingly, had given rise to these sentiments of humiliation and disgrace.

She did not for one moment attempt to disguise from herself the cruel injustice of this feeling. She knew well enough that Martinworth had conducted himself with unselfish and most unusual abnegation in withdrawing all claim to one who had said, "I am yours—take me!"

She knew that nine men out of ten would have unflinchingly held her to her word, allowing no temporary stumbling block of shrinking feminine vacillation to intercept the realization of their strivings, the unfaltering desire of years. She knew that it was his deep and absorbing love *that was the cause—the unconscious cause—of* that prompt decision of renouncing her for ever. And yet, knowing all this, it was in her eyes sufficient that he should have witnessed her in that period of humiliation, that he should have divined, if only partially, her agony of mind during those days of weakness and of degradation, for her to shrink, not only with fear and distaste, but what was more—with horror and dismay *from the man she had once so passionately loved*, so ardently admired and believed in.

She had fallen so low—so bitterly low in her own eyes. True, at the supreme moment of the crisis she had fled from the consequences of her final undoing. But Pearl's natural candour of disposition, her innate honesty, did not permit her to cloak over with weak sophistries and self-excuses what she knew at one time had been not only her firm *intention, but in those days of frenzy, her* sole desire and earnest aspiration.

During many hours of necessary idleness she would lie on her *chaise longue*, brooding over every incident since Martinworth had once more

come into her life. This process of self-examination became almost morbid in its intensity and repetition. But all her thought, her constant restless brooding, did not satisfactorily explain to her the reason of that hasty, that impetuous appeal at the eleventh hour to Amy Mendovy. Why had joyful anticipation so suddenly given place to terror? and what was the impulse that had prompted her at the last moment to indite that desperate, that frantic note for aid?

Pearl believed in a God, and at times she found herself asking if this sudden saving act, this possible loophole of escape, had not indeed been inspired by an unheard Voice, by Divine and Holy intermediation?

This question, however, like so many that she asked herself during these weeks, remained unanswered, and the only feeling that stood out clear in Pearl's confused and weary mind was the prayerful hope that never again would it be her misfortune to come across the man who had given rise to such relentless feelings of shame and self-humiliation.

Meanwhile Stanislas de Güldenfeldt was there, haunting her presence like a shadow, and Pearl did not disguise from herself that she found a great security and peace, a certain happiness, in the proximity of one who made it his pleasure and his duty to anticipate her slightest wish, to

sympathise with her every thought and feeling. Stanislas from the first moment of Pearl's convalescence had shown himself as gentle and as tender as a woman. With peculiar tact, without the slightest shade of fussiness, he was always on the spot, shielding her from every physical pain, from every mental worry. For the first time in her life Pearl appreciated the delight of being thoroughly spoiled and petted. What wonder if she learned to consider Stanislas as her own special property, and most certainly necessary to her comfort and well-being?

Amy would stand aloof, looking on with surprise and indignation at the sight of this big man with the strong face and commanding eyes being ordered about, the object of every capricious whim, every sudden fancy, and frequently scolded like a child for his pains. It seemed to her that there was something rather ridiculous and certainly slightly pathetic in the spectacle.

"Ralph," she said one day, when for the third time Stanislas had hurried off in the burning sun to the hotel, to fetch an extra rug or cushion for his lady-love, and Pearl, as a matter of course, had allowed him to go, "Ralph, will you promise me one thing? If you ever perceive incipient signs of an inclination on my part to treat you like a slave, will you please jilt me without hesi-

tation? I might lose you, but at any rate I should retain my respect for you."

"Well, then, let us hurry up and break it off at once," laughed Nicholson. "Could anyone see a more patient beast of burden than I am at the present moment? A sketch book, a paint box, a camp stool, a cushion, a parasol, and soon, when the sun gets cooler, I foresee—a coat. Perhaps you would kindly inform me of the difference of my fate to that of the man you pity."

"Don't talk nonsense, Ralph. You know perfectly well what I mean. Pray, do I keep you constantly on the trot? Why, the poor man is never allowed a second's leisure or repose. He's a slave, a perfectly abject slave. Pearl looks upon his devotion, upon the sacrifice of his time, not only as a matter of course, but as her right. And they're not even engaged yet."

"Well, one thing is they are bound to be before long," replied Ralph. "Bless you, my dear girl, he likes it, he glories in it. That rather stern 'phiz' of his has borne of late quite a seraphic expression. Leave the poor fellow alone, Amy, and let him be happy in his own way."

"All I can say is," replied Amy severely, "it is quite the last way I should have expected Stanislas de Güldenfeldt, of all people, to choose to be happy. It makes me quite ill to see a splendid big fellow like that reduced to the rank of the tamest of tame

cats, and what is more, appearing to delight in that extremely humiliating position."

"Don't distress yourself, my child," laughed Ralph, as they wandered off to their favourite seat beside the river. "It is a ridiculous phase through which we men pass, one and all, each as our turn comes. And though you pretend not to see it, Amy, I at this present time am in a precisely similar idiotic stage. Bless you, I know it, and do I complain? On the contrary, I survive the ordeal extremely well, while to the general outsider I appear, I am sure, as beaming and as blissfully foolish as de Güldenfeldt. We both have every intention of getting our *quid pro quo* later on, you know."

The person discussed was, as Nicholson announced, entirely satisfied with the existing state of affairs. Monsieur de Güldenfeldt would indeed have been willing to allow matters to proceed in the same easy fashion for ever, had he not one day received a warning that it was time for him to speak again.

Mrs. Rawlinson had been watching the progress of events with characteristic shrewdness. Her observations caused her after a time to conclude that de Güldenfeldt and Pearl had both reached a stage which, however delightful in its dreamy uncertainty, certainly as far as the future of her cousin was concerned, was

a long way from being either practical or desirable.

She therefore made up her mind that matters should be brought to a climax. A prompt and decisive action appeared still more necessary on the receipt one morning of a letter from Lady Martinworth, announcing the fact of the couple's premeditated visit to Chuzenji, and begging Mrs. Rawlinson to telephone for rooms at the hotel.

Rosina's heart sank at this news, for though Pearl had never taken her cousin into her confidence, her ravings during her delirium, independently of her subsequent melancholy, were facts sufficient to explain the unfortunate influence Lord Martinworth still exercised over the younger woman's impressible and sensitive nature.

She saw how absolutely necessary it was before his appearance once more upon the scene that matters between Pearl and de Güldenfeldt should be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Rosina was never long in making up her mind, and having once determined on a little judicious meddling, she captured the would-be lover one day as he was lounging off to join Pearl, and in a manner thoroughly typical, straightway went to the point.

"Monsieur de Güldenfeldt," she said, as she took his arm and led him over the stony road through the straggling Japanese village, "I want

to speak to you about Pearl. You remember your conversation with me some weeks ago, do you not?"

"Certainly," replied the Swedish Minister, whose cheeks flushed like a boy's at this abrupt mention of Mrs. Nugent's name, "certainly, I remember it, and your kindness to me during her illness. What is it you want to say, Mrs. Rawlinson?"

"Of course," resumed Rosina, "I should not venture to broach the subject if you had not yourself first mentioned your hopes to me. Monsieur de Güldenfeldt——" and Rosina stopped in her walk and gazed at him straight with her shrewd brown eyes, "I think, if you wish to make certain of Pearl, you ought to ask her again without further delay."

De Güldenfeldt kicked a stone in the pathway.

"Why," he said, "why this hurry?" He laughed uneasily. "To tell you the truth," he added, "I acknowledge to you—I am afraid! That's a nice confession to make, is it not? for a man of my age and experience, and one who is half an Englishman to boot? I'm afraid—downright afraid to again ask Mrs. Nugent to be my wife."

He paused, and then continued nervously: "It would be more than I could bear if she refused me a second time, you know. Why not leave well alone? Matters are pleasant enough as they are."

"Very well, of course you know your own business best," replied Rosina calmly. "I certainly don't venture to prophesy the result of your proposal. I mistrust my own sex too well to answer for their vagaries. Nevertheless, my dear friend, I think Pearl is beginning to learn your value, and—and—by the bye," she added, glancing quickly up into his face, "the Martinworths are going to Chuzenji. We are to engage rooms for them, as they wish to escape the heat of Tokyo as soon as possible."

Monsieur de Güldenfeldt made no reply. But with considerable satisfaction Rosina observed, through the corners of her eyes, the change in his expression at her communication.

"If that won't bring him to his senses, nothing will," she thought.

And as usual, Rosina was right.

All during this happy time of inaction de Güldenfeldt had not once thought of Martinworth's existence. Lord and Lady Martinworth had arrived in Japan during his absence from the capital. On his return he had more than once met the latter at Pearl's house. He had inquired after the husband, been told he was travelling, and since then had never given him another thought.

Naturally, he knew nothing of what had occurred in Tokyo. Mrs. Rawlinson's tone and expression of countenance had however, been more than

significant. Stanislas awoke suddenly to the fact that, with the re-arrival on the scene of operations of the man who had formerly played so important a part in Pearl's life, there arose an obstacle, a threatening danger, on which he had but little reckoned, and for which he found himself totally unprepared.

In spite, therefore, of the timidity of which he had made so *naïve* a confession, he resolved to take Mrs. Rawlinson's friendly hint, and to speak again without delay.

The opportunity was not long in occurring.

That afternoon Pearl announced her intention of attempting the ascent to Ieyasu's Tomb.* So far, she had not ventured to climb the numberless steps that lead to the Shogun's last resting place, but it was a spot she dearly loved, and she never left Nikko without paying this hallowed ground at least one visit.

It was somewhat late in the afternoon when she and de Güldenfeldt left the hotel. As they walked through the Temple grounds and arrived at the steps the sun was still hot, and glistened like a stream of fire through the forests and belts of brilliant maple trees beyond, lighting up their sheeny green with a glory of colour, golden, daz-

*Ieyasu was the first Shogun of the Tokugawa dynasty. His remains were removed to their present resting place at Nikko in 1617.

zling and intense. Both were silent as they slowly mounted the steps, bordered by the moss-grown balustrade of stone. Beyond was the glowing outer world, but here around them, centuries old, were the black and threatening cryptomeria pines, towering on either side like great angels of darkness spreading wide their gloomy wings, while away in the distance through the vast dreamy forest, the wind rose and fell with mystical and harmonious cadence.

Up and up they climbed, and as she paused for breath Pearl felt a delightful feeling of exaltation at the sight of these lofty trees, these grand and ancient pines, guarding like giant sentinels the balustrade of stone, and the wide and numberless steps, green with moss and age. She knew so well that this solemn approach led,—not to some magnificent palace, not to some temple, gorgeous with colouring, and wonderful with intricate carvings, but—buried within the heart of the forest—to a little lonely tomb of bronze, shaped like an urn, and guarded on either side by the sacred stork, the symbolic and gigantic lotus leaves.

What more noble—what more awe-inspiring than this towering, upward, and impressive approach to all that is most pathetically simple, most modestly unadorned of funeral monuments to the honoured and beloved dead? Only an

artist mind of an artist country could have planned, created, and carried out this beautiful and poetical thought, and only artist minds, such as Pearl's and de Güldenfeldt's, could know how to appreciate,—how to adore,—the nobility and grandeur of the conception.

Pearl was still silent as she sat down on the stone coping surrounding the bronze urn, listening to the wind as it musically and eternally sighed through the banks of trees beyond. Just before starting for her walk Rosina had told her of Lady Martinworth's letter, and she was still under the influence of dismay aroused by the unwelcome news. A feeling not only of complete helplessness, but of approaching evil, overshadowed her. She felt stupefied, paralysed by what she had heard. The news was totally unexpected, for only the day before Pearl left Tokyo Lady Martinworth had volunteered the information of her approaching departure from Japan. Pearl found herself wondering what unforeseen circumstances could have caused her to change this determination. Was it that Lady Martinworth had made her arrangements without consulting her husband? and was it possible that he himself had other plans in view? In spite of his assurances and promises in her house that night, was it—could it be—that he wished to see her

again, that he still had hopes, was still unwearied in his pursuit?

Pearl's growing dislike awakened her suspicions, and made her foresee and fear every probable, every improbable design on Martinworth's part, all sense of justice being swamped in this new-born dread of a man she had been willing not so long since to follow to the end of the world.

She was aroused from these anxious forebodings, these problematical and gloomy prognostications, by the sound of her companion's voice. He had seated himself by her side on the coping, and on glancing up into his face, Pearl was struck by its gravity and unusual pallor.

"Mrs. Nugent," he said slowly, looking at her very intently, "will you be so kind as to give me your attention for a few moments? I wish to ask you something."

Pearl, who understood instinctively the meaning of these preliminary words, flushed—merely bowing her assent.

"Some months ago," continued de Güldenfeldt gravely, "I ventured to ask you for your hand. You refused me. And I confess I took your refusal very much, very deeply to heart. I felt then that, however much I might desire you for my wife, I could never bring myself to repeat the request. But I love you dearly, Pearl,"—here his eyes grew large and soft as they rested on her

face—"you are everything in the wide world to me. I feel I cannot live without you, and before this one absorbing passion of my life, all my surprise, my anger, my pride have fallen away from me, and now once more I beg you to listen to me, and to grant me the great gift of your most precious self."

As he said the last words, Stanislas rose from his seat, and standing before Pearl, held out his two hands towards her.

Pearl said nothing in reply, but with a smile of great sweetness simply placed her hands in his. He drew her up beside himself, and bending down, kissed her on the forehead.

And thus they silently stood lit up by the slanting sun, while the wind sang in the trees its eternal song of peace. Stanislas held her in his arms, a great joy filling his heart as he gazed down into the beautiful pale face of this woman whom he had gained at last, and whom he vowed to himself should one day love him as he loved her.

At length Pearl broke the long and expressive silence, until now only disturbed by the throbbing of their hearts.

"Monsieur de Güldenfeldt," she said quietly, as she drew herself slightly away from him, "you have asked me to be your wife, and I accept, for I know now that though I cannot yet give you my love, I like you much, yes, very, very

much. Perhaps, however, when you hear what I have to say, you will regret what you have done. Better however, a thousand times that you should know now, and part from me while your love is still young, than that in the years to come you should discover my weakness, learn in consequence to despise me, and leave me to die of grief. Will you listen a moment to me, Stanislas, while I tell you what happened after you left Tokyo?"

De Güldenfeldt's face clouded, but he answered gently as he once more put his arms around her and drew her to him.

"No, Pearl," he said, "I will not listen to you. It is better not, dear. I wish to know nothing. I believe in you and trust you, darling. Have I not known your life for years? Has it not been as an open book to me?"

"Yes, and for that very reason," replied Pearl firmly, "there must be no closed chapters in it. If you do not let me speak now, I cannot be your wife. For I have sworn,—my friend,—there must be no secrets between you and me."

"Speak, then," replied de Güldenfeldt, somewhat sadly, "if you will it so."

But Pearl did not seem in a hurry to take advantage of the permission thus reluctantly given. With a sigh she sat down again on the stone coping, half shielding her face with her hand.

At length she opened her lips to speak. Her

voice was low, but there was a clearness, an incisiveness in the tones that impressed her listener. She gazed straight before her and spoke unhesitatingly, as if relating an oft-repeated tale.

"Shortly after you left," she said, "the Martinworths arrived in Tokyo. I had been warned of their approaching arrival. Nevertheless, I eventually met them unexpectedly at the Imperial garden-party. It was a shock to me to see them —to see him—there, and on my return home I was still thinking over this meeting, when Lady Martinworth called on me. Before her departure from my house she confided to me her attachment to her husband, and she told me that she was a very unhappy woman. She made also a strange request. She asked me to be her friend. She appeared very much moved, very much upset. Finally I took her in my arms and comforted her, and, feeling very, very sorry for her, I promised her my friendship."

Here Pearl paused, and looked up at Monsieur de Güldenfeldt with a slight flush on her cheeks.

"She had hardly left me," she continued, "when Lord Martinworth was announced. I perceived at once the change—a change for the worse—in him. But I was hardly prepared for his accusations against me, as the cause of that change. He blamed me for many things, and seemed to think my leaving him after obtaining my divorce

—when I might have been his wife—was prompted by interested motives. My anger rose at the injustice of his accusations, and I replied very strongly, very bitterly, begging him to leave me and to return to his wife. I held out my hand to him as a token of farewell, and as he took it between his own and kept it there, I felt the revival of all my love for him. He pleaded with me"—here Pearl grew pale once more—"and I—and I—listened, Stanislas—at last—to his pleading. I was on the point of yielding to his prayers, for I felt I had loved him so deeply, and for so very long—I was yielding, I say—when I remembered my recent promise to his wife. It was that remembrance, I think, that made me pause. I bade him go. And he left me."

At this juncture Pearl remained silent a long time. So long, indeed, that de Güldenfeldt thought she had completed what she wished to say, and he was himself about to speak when —holding up her hand to silence him—she continued :—

"And now, Stanislas, comes the worst part of what I have to say. It is death to me to tell you what followed, but even at the risk of losing you for ever I feel you must, before calling me your wife, know the truth about me. Martinworth was hardly out of the house before I repented of what I had done. I longed for him so. And I

was so very, very lonely. That night, however, and for many days and nights, I prayed God to keep him from me. I prayed with all my heart, with all my strength, and yet were my prayers truly sincere? I know not. I thought they were. But one day, when I saw that he kept away, that he did not come, I wrote to him and told him—and told him—that—"

Here Pearl paused again, hiding her face in her hands.

"Yes," said de Güldenfeldt gravely, as he laid his hand gently on her arm, "I understand, dear. Don't enter into particulars. Don't pain yourself by unnecessary explanations."

"I expected him that evening," continued Mrs. Nugent in a muffled voice, "and Stanislas—I was happy, quite happy in the thought that he would come to me. But even now, I cannot tell how or why it was, but as the hour drew near I began to feel—to realise the enormity of my sin. It came upon me with a sudden flash that I—I who had fought and resisted and striven so long, that I, Pearl Nugent—so proud of my virtue, so scornful of the want of it in others—was falling from the height of my pride and self-content, falling, falling—to utter destruction, to utter perdition of body and of soul.

"The horror of that moment—of that awaken-
—I can never express. The iron has entered

into my soul, and will leave its mark for ever. At first, I believed it was too late to retract. I did not know what to do—where to fly from the misery and dishonour that I knew were overtaking me. Then I thought of Amy. And though she had told me she was going to a ball that night, a ball that would settle her future one way or the other, I wrote begging her to give it up, imploring her to come to me at once. She came. And her presence in my house that evening saved me."

"And Martinworth?" inquired de Güldenfeldt, fixing his piercing eyes on Pearl's face.

"Lord Martinworth came at the hour appointed. He stayed a short time, a very short time. I can hardly tell you what passed—for I know that I—I—was partially unconscious most of the time that he remained. I remember however, his leave-taking. It was, Stanislas, an eternal farewell. He acted generously—nobly, as only he could act. But I hardly knew what he said. I longed so for him to leave me—for him to go. And it was only when the door closed behind him that I breathed and lived once more.

"And now, my friend, you have heard all I have to tell you. It is, I know, a shameful story. A story of weakness and of humiliation. Since that awful night, my one hope, my one prayer, has been never more to set eyes on this man, who until that evening had for so many years engrossed my affec-

tions and my thoughts. My prayer, it appears, is not to be answered. He is going to Chuzenji. The knowledge of this move of his I thought at first would kill me. But now I know that you love me, that you are near me and—and——

"Yes! you know all, and, Stanislas, perhaps now you will retract your words, and cast me off—and say you do not care for me. For indeed, I am not worthy—unstable, foolish, weak woman that I am—to be the wife of such a man as you."

Pearl ceased. And for a moment there was silence. Mrs. Nugent felt herself trembling, as with averted eyes she gazed out at the waving pine trees far before her. De Güldenfeldt's face, which had been grave and rather stern while Pearl was speaking, remained pensive for some seconds longer. He looked at her and his expression changed, while a gleam like a ray of sun lit up his blue eyes. He smiled very sweetly as he took Pearl in his arms, and pushing back the little auburn curls, kissed her again on the forehead.

"My poor child—my poor child," he murmured, "to think that once you should have told me that bitter experience had taught you a lesson—the lesson how to protect yourself. Ah, Pearl, you may be beautiful—you may be sweet—you may be the angel of goodness that I think you, in spite of the many hard names you call yourself,—you may be all these things and much, much more,

but of one fact I am certain—you are sadly in need of someone to help you, to take charge of you, to guide you, darling. That task, with your permission, I, Stanislas de Güldenfeldt, mean for the future to undertake."

Thus, in perfect peace and contentment, they sat together until the evening fell and the stars came out. It was only as they slowly wended homewards that Pearl, on looking back into the gloaming, realised with dread and a sad foreboding, that their mutual vows had been interchanged beneath the shadow of a tomb.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRICE OF A KISS.

Pearl's engagement to Stanislas de Güldenfeldt was not generally announced. They both had their reasons for keeping the fact to themselves, and it was only Mrs. Nugent's immediate family, and Sir Ralph Nicholson, as so soon to form one of that family, who were initiated into the secret.

Rosina was radiant, as indeed she well might be, for, after months of feminine vacillation, were not both her beautiful charges at last satisfactorily disposed of? Naturally, perhaps, she took the credit of Pearl's engagement entirely to herself. She told her husband it would never have come off if it had not been for that necessary progging, given so judiciously to the devoted and constant, yet hesitating lover.

At this information Mr. Rawlinson growled forth the remark that she would far better have left matters alone. That people who mixed themselves up in such affairs generally ended by burning their own fingers, and that if de Güldenfeldt, at his age, didn't know his own mind, well, all

that he could say was he was a far greater fool than he had given him credit for being.

He further remarked—for when once wound up Tom Rawlinson was not devoid of conversation,—that it was perfect bosh, in his opinion, this ridiculous effusion and fuss over a simple and every-day engagement of marriage. No doubt all the world gushed in the same absurd manner over Pearl's first marriage. And pray, how had that turned out? Certainly he, for one, didn't see that de Güldenfeldt was doing such a very good thing for himself. True, Pearl was a pretty woman, pleasant too, and had an uncommonly good fortune of her own. But then, look at that business with her first husband, to say nothing of that uncomfortable scandal with that fellow Martinworth, who, in his opinion, would far better have kept in England, instead of coming to Japan and getting into further mischief.

For his own part, he liked de Güldenfeldt. He was a capital chap, and he thought it was a pity he was wasting himself on a woman who, in spite of certain attractions, never succeeded in being of the same mind two days running. In fact, in his humble opinion, he was far too good for Pearl.

Thus, having reduced his wife almost to the verge of tears, Tom Rawlinson took his hat and went for a tramp across the hills.

Nevertheless, shortly after he had relieved his

mind in this downright fashion, Mr. Rawlinson informed Pearl that it was his express wish that she should be married from his house. He likewise announced his intention of bearing all the expenses of the *trousseau* and the wedding. In fact he begged that she would understand that she was to look upon herself, for that occasion at least, as a daughter of the house. Further, he requested her acceptance of a trifling cheque with which to buy herself a jewel, which, he need not add, he would feel greatly flattered by her wearing on her wedding day.

The cheque was a substantial one, representing the sum of a hundred guineas.

By this time all the party had moved up to Chuzenji. Pearl was supremely happy in her Japanese wooden house on the borders of the lake. She loved her picturesque, bright little abode, with its fresh, clean *tatami*,* its beautifully engrained wood, its white walls and ceilings, and its sliding paper doors and cupboards. But above all, she loved the broad, cool verandah, on which was passed the hot period of the day, and from which was visible the most extensive, the most lovely view of lake and mountains in all Chuzenji. She would rest her arms on the balustrade of this verandah, which hung completely over the water, and there she would remain, idle and happy for

*Japanese matting.

hours, watching the limpid, laughing lake with its frame of wooded mountains and its ever changing banks of clouds.

But it was in the early morning that Pearl found Chuzenji the most seductive, that she loved it best. After the opening of the *amado**—without which protection against storm and rain and thieves no Japanese house would be complete—she would lie in bed, and with her face turned towards the lake would watch with a dreamy fascination the scene before her.

And indeed, the picture upon which she gazed with enchanted eyes was an ideal one. The sapphire blueness of the water, on which at that hour seldom a ripple was to be seen—the chain of wooded mountains rising up large and indistinct, and garlanded by vast pearly belts of caressing, fleecy clouds,—the little village on the opposite side, with its sparkling beach and tiny wooden houses, glistening like snow in the brilliant sun—the Japanese fishing boat, with one great, white wing faintly fluttering in the soft and wavering breeze—Pearl would gaze entranced at all this bewitching beauty of the mysterious silent morn, enveloped in a hazy mantle of perfect peace and calm—and, gazing, she would thank God that she lived.

Monsieur de Güldenfeldt was as enthusiastic as

*Outside wooden shutters.

his *fiancée* over the varied charms of Chuzenji. They would pass together the greater part of those sweet, sunny days, either sailing or rowing on the lake, or when they wished to vary their form of exercise, taking long tramps across the mountains to the plains where the myriads of wild flowers and the great white tiger lilies grow. As Pearl became stronger, they would sometimes walk to the neighbouring village of Yumoto, most beautiful and secluded, with its forest of giant pines and maples that overhang the miniature lake. Curious and unique, too, is this lovely mountain spot, its chief characteristic being its open-air sulphur baths, among the suffocating fumes of which the lower-class Japanese of both sexes are seen disporting themselves, sometimes for hours at a time, their sole array being Nature's garb of innocent simplicity.

Meanwhile, Pearl was far from feeling that happiness and contentment of mind she certainly counted upon when she bound herself by promise to marry Monsieur de Güldenfeldt. As the days passed she knew, without analysing her feelings very deeply, that it was impossible for her to give that love that he in time would without doubt claim as his due. In spite of his many delightful qualities which called forth her sincere admiration, in spite of his more than ordinary share of intelligence and good looks, of the seductive

tones and subtle charm of manner, and above all, —in spite of his great and absorbing devotion to herself, Pearl Nugent's heart did not beat one iota the faster at the sound of his voice, at the touch of his hand, or at his presence by her side.

And the day when she discovered to her dismay the fact that not only did she not care for him, but that, above all, de Guldenfeldt's great affection for herself was acting as an irritant upon her nerves, Mrs. Nugent was indeed a woman to be pitied. Before her engagement she had thoroughly appreciated the hundred little attentions with which he had surrounded her, and what is more, had almost looked upon them as her right. Now however, that she was bound to him by promise, she found her feelings undergoing an unexpected and most lamentable transformation. She made every effort to disguise this change of front from her lover, and she flattered herself that she succeeded fairly well.

Her surprise, therefore, would have been profound, and would have equalled her dismay, if she had divined that Stanislas de Guldenfeldt was, to a very great extent, aware of the constant and bitter struggle that was being fought within her heart.

De Guldenfeldt was, however, a patient man. His chief object had been gained, namely, Pearl's promise of herself. He was, therefore,

content to bide his time for what he flattered himself must necessarily follow ere long—the promise of her love.

But though generally right in his calculations, on this occasion the Swedish Minister was entirely at fault. Indeed, it was not surprising that in this instance he should make a mistake. De Güldenfeldt's knowledge of the intricate workings of the female mind was unusually vague and superficial for one who so prominently and for so many years had mixed in the world. His immersion hitherto in the political and the more serious side of his profession, and the life led—as a recreation to those duties—of scientific thought and study, was the worst school for attaining a knowledge of womankind. Stanislas at this period of his existence, though he was the last to acknowledge this deficiency, was more ignorant than many a modern youth of twenty of those inexplicable feminine contradictions that contribute not only towards the frenzy and the despair, but likewise to the frequent destruction of too confiding man.

If his experience of women had been a trifle greater, de Güldenfeldt's eyes would have opened to the fact that this very indifference to his presence, this very shrinking from his words and acts of affection, which Pearl tried so vainly to disguise, was the sure and certain proof that no amount of persuasion, of patience, or of tact

would succeed in securing him that love on which he relied for his future happiness. If he could but have known it, Pearl was simply incapable of again feeling a throb of passion. Her devotion for Martinworth had lasted too long—had burnt too deeply into her soul—to be capable of being rekindled, or of blazing afresh, lighted by another hand. Pearl knew it now. And as the days went on, and she was more and more in de Güldenfeldt's society, and as more and more he treated her as his own especial property, she gradually realized that of the many mistakes she had made of late, this last was the most disastrous, the most fatal of her life.

It was about this time that Mrs. Nugent received an answer to her letter to Mr. Hall. Enclosed with the letter was a copy of her will drawn up from the rough draft she had sent her lawyer, and which only required to be signed and witnessed to make it legal. Pearl put the private letter aside to be perused at leisure, and witnessed by Count Carlitti and Tom Rawlinson, she signed the document, with the intention of despatching it by the mail that was leaving the same day.

Mr. Rawlinson was nothing if not business-like. And whereas Carlitti had signed the will in a blissful state of ignorance as to its purport or contents, and at the sight of a favourite lady-friend sweeping past Pearl's door had im-

mediately hurried in pursuit,—the former, before venturing to put his name to paper, had ponderously read and weighed every clause of the document.

"You will excuse me, Pearl," he said, as after a very firm and upright 'Thomas Rawlinson,' he deposited the parchment on the table, and leaning against the frail wood-work of the Japanese *shoji** he lit a cigar, "you will excuse me if I venture, as a member of the family, to make a remark. In my opinion this is an uncommonly rum sort of will of yours. Deuced pleasant for Amy Mendovy, I allow, and it is nice of you to have remembered Rosina so extremely handsomely. But may I be allowed to inquire where your future husband, de Güldenfeldt, has a look in? It seems to me that you have ignored his existence altogether."

Pearl flushed. "I am not yet married to Monsieur de Güldenfeldt," she murmured, "and as his *fiancée* I have certainly never for a moment thought of leaving him my money. He does not need it. He has plenty of his own."

"Doubtless," and Pearl blushed a deeper crimson under the scrutiny of the keen eyes, "but you will, I suppose, in the natural course of events, be married to him before many months have passed. It is, I should have thought, hardly seemly to cut him out entirely. Don't you agree with me?"

*Sliding window.

"The date of our marriage is not yet fixed. I am not married to him yet," she repeated, rather helplessly. "When—when we are married—nothing will be easier, I suppose, than to make a new will. In fact the old will does not hold good in those circumstances. Besides, there will be the settlements. I am perfectly aware that you mean well, Tom. But don't distress yourself. I know what I am about."

"Well, then, I'm blest if I do, and that's flat!" exclaimed Rawlinson. "No shilly shallying, I hope, my fair cousin. Let me tell you, once for all, de Güldenfeldt is not the sort of fellow to stand any confounded feminine nonsense. Pay attention to what I say, my dear, and don't for heaven's sake, behave like a fool."

Pearl drew herself up, and her eyes flashed ominously.

"Really, Tom," she said, "I think you—you—go a little too far. You presume somewhat on our relationship. I do not wish to believe that you have any real intention of being rude or disagreeable, but—well—to begin with, I never asked you to read my will. And I don't believe for a moment that it is usual for a witness to read through a will before signing it."

"Don't you, indeed! Well! I tell you it is usual for Tom Rawlinson to do so. You needn't have done me the honour of asking me to witness

it if you didn't like the habit. But," he added, seeing she still looked angry, "don't let us wrangle about such a trifle. You mustn't be vexed at my plain speaking, Pearl. Remember, I stand *in loco parentis* to you, and if that position doesn't give me the right to offer advice and to speak my mind, I don't know what should. But when, I should like to know, did a woman ever take advice? Nevertheless, I repeat I am puzzled with regard to your treatment of de Güldenfeldt. He is a first-rate chap, Pearl."

"Oh! you dear old Tom, as if I didn't know that. Am I likely to forget it, when the fact is being everlastingly dinned into my poor ears? How often have I not been told by you, and Rosina, and Amy, that I am the luckiest woman on the face of the earth to have succeeded in securing such a treasure? It is not necessary to impress this information so often, so very often, upon me, I assure you, Tom. I am perfectly aware of my good luck, and you may rest satisfied that I have no intention whatsoever of forfeiting such a prize. Nevertheless, in spite of your objections, and of anything that you may consider it your duty to say, my money, certainly for the present, goes to Amy, and not to Stanislas. Why? it was chiefly for that purpose and for the pleasure of being able to leave it to her, that I decided to accept that horrid fortune."

"Indeed! Well, I suppose you know your own wishes best. She's a lucky girl. Not that she is ever likely to get it. Your life is as good as hers, any day," with which farewell shaft Tom Rawlinson took his departure.

"A queer woman, that Pearl," he remarked to his wife that evening over his second glass of port. "Hysterical, and nervous and uncertain. I wouldn't be in that poor fellow de Güldenfeldt's shoes for all I'm worth. Not that she'll ever marry him, that's one blessing."

"What?" shrieked Rosina and Amy in chorus. "Oh, Tom, what do you mean?" added his wife tremulously.

"I mean what I say. At the last moment—she'll wait till then, of course—but at the last moment, Pearl Nugent will throw de Güldenfeldt over. I warn you she has not the slightest intention of marrying him. She finds it very convenient to have a devoted idiot eternally dangling after her. But she'll never come up to the scratch. She's as shifty and as vacillating as you make 'em. A most untrustworthy woman, I call her, in spite of her prettiness, her money, and all the rest of it."

"You've disliked Pearl from the commencement, Tom," replied Rosina as she rose from the table, "and of course nothing I may say will be likely to change your opinion. But I really think,

before making these rash assertions, you should have some grounds to go upon."

"I by no means dislike your Pearl. In fact I rather like her. But with regard to her heart affairs, she—as a weak, vacillating member of your sex,—in my opinion, takes the cake. Mark my words, Rosina, my fair and fascinating cousin Pearl will never be the wife of Stanislas de Güldenfeldt."

"As he gets older your poor uncle's habit of constantly repeating himself increases," remarked Rosina, as she and Amy settled themselves in the little rowing boat. "He really is a most tiresome man. This engagement of Pearl's is so very satisfactory in every way. I was so enchanted about it. And now he makes me wretched with those horrid prognostications of his. I wonder what can have induced him to take such an annoying idea into his head. So shortly after everything has all been comfortably settled, too. You don't think that there is any ground for his fears, do you, Amy?"

Amy was silent, while her eyes grew thoughtful. "Yes," she said after a minute, "I think that perhaps uncle is right. I am sure Pearl is not happy, auntie. She tries her utmost to like Stanislas, but nothing she can do will ever succeed in making her really care for him. He has got on her nerves. I can see that."

"And he's such a dear, charming fellow, and so absolutely devoted to her."

"Whereas, if he were a worthless but fascinating scoundrel, who merely desired to marry her for her money, she would probably adore him, and be grovelling at his feet for a kind word. We women are made like that," replied Amy, with a worldly wisdom beyond her years.

"Well, at any rate, your affairs and Ralph's are all right. That's one comfort."

"I'm not so sure of that. I've discovered lately that Ralph is by no means perfection, and as life is far too short to devote time to the correction of settled bad habits, I'm not at all certain, auntie, but that in the end I may be reduced to the unpleasant necessity of throwing him over," and Amy's eyes gleamed with mischief as she glanced up at her aunt and gave an extra strong pull at the sculls.

Mrs. Rawlinson's face for the space of a moment was indicative of the deepest despair But bitter experience had taught her wisdom, and she made no reply. She had long ago given up attempting to fathom the intricate traits of her young niece's character, or of trying to decide in her own mind those moments when Amy meant seriously or the reverse. Thus on the present occasion she held her peace, and with a sigh of resignation placidly folded her plump hands upon

her lap. Trusting that a merciful Providence would take the matter up, she offered a secret prayer that in spite of the perversity of a troublesome niece, all might ultimately come right in the end.

The Martinworths had taken possession of their rooms in the hotel. Circumstances, however, had so far arranged themselves that the inevitable meeting between Pearl and Lord Martinworth had not so far taken place. Pearl had on the contrary been constantly thrown in contact with his wife, the latter having contracted the habit of running in and out of Mrs. Nugent's house whenever an opportunity occurred. Pearl found her looking both unhappy and ill, but though she more than half divined the cause, Lady Martinworth volunteered no information, rarely indeed mentioning her husband's name. It was purely incidentally that, in the course of conversation one day, Pearl learnt that Lord Martinworth's health was, in his wife's opinion by no means satisfactory, and consequently, the cause of considerable anxiety.

With that vague fear and dismay felt by Pearl whenever she now thought or spoke of Martinworth, she nevertheless nerved herself, on receiving this intimation, to make one or two necessary and polite inquiries.

"I hope," she said rather formally, "that you

are not seriously uneasy as to Lord Martinworth's health? If so, this is the last place to bring him to. We have no doctor up here, you know."

"Life is too short to fuss over people who decline to be fussed over," replied Lady Martinworth philosophically. "Dick bites off my head if I suggest he is out of sorts. So now I hold my tongue. But the fact remains, his nerves are completely unstrung, and he's jumpy to a degree. His temper, too, has been unbearable ever since he returned from that trip. I think it must be the Japanese food that disagreed with him. He lived on it for two months. And we all know the digestion acts to a great extent on the temper and the nerves."

Pearl smiled. "I should say it is much more likely to be the climate than the food. Nervous people always come to grief in Japan. I should get him away if I were you."

Lady Martinworth glanced sharply at Mrs. Nugent.

"That is most excellent advice, my dear," she said dryly, "and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to follow it. But unfortunately Martinworth possesses a will before which—from my experience—everything and everybody give way in the end."

Pearl changed colour, and turned the conversation.

It was some days after the above remarks that Mrs. Nugent and de Guldenfeldt decided to row half way down the lake to Shogonohama. They beached their boat, wandering under the shade of the maples, till they found themselves in the little hut overlooking the waterfall. The rain had poured in torrents for the whole of the day and night before. The cascade, always beautiful, was that day simply magnificent, and the sheets of water crowned with their wreaths of snowy foam, were tearing over the smooth surface of the rocks, and across the fallen trunks of trees, in unbridled and uncontrollable fury. The sight was a glorious one, if somewhat appalling, and the noise was deafening. Pearl and de Guldenfeldt sat close to each other, silent and impressed, he half supporting her with his arm, for the barrier against which they leant—a frail and rotten bamboo—was their only protection from sure and summary destruction.

The sight of rushing, roaring waters invariably worked upon Pearl's emotions. The present moment, with its many lovely accessories, a brilliant blue sky, massive, fern-grown rocks, and surrounding woods of every shade of green—stirred her greatly, and combined in awakening feelings that had long lain dormant in her heart.

With unusual demonstrativeness she turned towards Stanislas, her lids parted, and her eyes

shining like stars, and taking his hand between her own, she laid it gently against her cheek. Since their engagement, Pearl had volunteered but few proofs of tenderness, and the present action on her part was so spontaneous, so unexpected, that Stanislas felt the blood surging up into his head, and his heart throbbing, as in reply he leant forward, and pressing her to him, he kissed her passionately on the lips.

A moment later they both instinctively knew—for they could hear nothing owing to the deafening roar of the waters,—that someone was watching them from behind. They turned simultaneously, their eyes meeting those of Lord Martinworth fixed upon them—while Amy Mendovy—apparently extremely wretched and uncomfortable—was standing by his side.

Arriving from an opposite direction and at that unfortunate moment sharply turning a corner, Martinworth and Amy had fallen thus upon the unconscious pair, necessarily witnessing the whole tender and silently acted scene.

At such a sacred moment, the last thing one would ask is to be disturbed, and however true and deep and absorbing may be a man's feelings at the time, it is hardly a pleasant sentiment to know that to the ordinary outside and amused observer one must necessarily be looking somewhat like a fool.

And yet, to his intense annoyance, it was in this undignified and unusual position that de Güldenfeldt now found himself. Perhaps it was only human nature that, being the sole person at fault, his rage should straightway centre itself upon one who so far had proved himself, except by his uncalled-for and unfortunate arrival, entirely inoffensive.

He took two steps forward in Lord Martinworth's direction, and was about to pour forth a flow of angry words and enquiries, when his eloquence was abruptly nipped in the bud by the expression on his would-be victim's face.

And, indeed, the transformation visible on that countenance, which de Güldenfeldt had known so well in former days, was enough not only to astonish, but to paralyze the bravest man. For the face was no longer human. It was almost that of a fiend.

Lord Martinworth was looking straight at Pearl. His blue eyes, which she had always known so soft and tender, so gentle and so kind, gleamed wildly, seeming to be charged with lightning under the contracting eyebrows. His mouth was slightly open, and through the sneering lips shone the white teeth, while the nostrils of the delicate nose were quivering with excitement and with rage. Features so transformed were sufficient in themselves to terrify the most courageous. But

an expression of bitter, overwhelming hate and fury, resting like a veil upon the livid face, completed the appalling picture.

He did not say a word. He hardly seemed to breathe. But he stood—for what seemed to the spectators an endless period—staring at Pearl Nugent with those frenzied eyes. With one hand half-lifted before her, as if to shut off the sight, and with the other clutching de Güldenfeldt's arm, she looked back, white and trembling with fear, yet as if half-hypnotised, into Martinworth's face.

At last the tension proving more than she could bear, Pearl gave one little piteous moan, and sank unconscious upon the earthern floor of the shed.

This alarming occurrence roused all from the spell that had hitherto held them silent and inactive. Martinworth, casting one last look of infinite hatred and contempt at the inanimate form, turned and left the hut, while de Güldenfeldt and Amy, bending over Pearl, and engrossed in their attempts to restore her back to consciousness, hardly noticed that he was gone.

For long their efforts seemed unavailing. But at last Pearl slowly opened her grey eyes, smiling sweetly at de Güldenfeldt as he leant over her. Then consciousness and memory returning, the terrified expression shadowed once more the pale face.

"Where is he?" she whispered, starting up. "Has he gone?"

"Yes, my darling, he has gone away," replied Amy, taking the still trembling form in her arms. "You have nothing to fear, Pearl."

"He is gone! And you did not kill him!" exclaimed Pearl, tearing herself from Amy's arms and facing de Güldenfeldt. "Oh God! you let him go? You did not kill him? And you call yourself a man?"

Stanislas de Güldenfeldt's first expression of surprise changed to one of sorrow. At the moment it seemed to him that this most uncalled-for and unexpected attack was a return of Pearl's illness and delirium.

"Hush! dear, hush!" he said soothingly. "Why should I kill Martinworth? He did nothing."

"You say he did nothing?" she cried excitedly. "You saw the horrible way in which he looked at me, and you say he did nothing? Oh, coward! —coward!"

The blood flew into de Güldenfeldt's cheeks, and he bit his lips.

"Don't excite yourself, Pearl," he replied quietly. "Of course, if you think Martinworth has insulted you, he shall answer to me for it. Now come home, for you are ill, dear, and it is getting late."

Pearl said no more, suffering herself to be led

between Amy and Stanislas, though she was still trembling like a leaf when they placed her in the boat. From the moment that she was seated in the stern, Mrs. Nugent lapsed into gloomy silence. Her former excitement, greatly to the relief of both, appeared to have passed as quickly as it had risen. She sat with her hands clasped on her knees, staring out before her, but taking no notice of passing objects.

The silent row home against a high wind seemed endless. But at length they arrived at Mrs. Nugent's house, and Amy, as a matter of course, followed her cousin within its shelter.

Stanislas knew that with Miss Mendovy Pearl was in safe and tender hands. But he looked very white and drawn, and he heaved a deep sigh as turning back into the boat he sculled himself home.

From the moment that he and Amy had half lifted her into the boat Pearl had completely ignored his presence, nor had she answered, or taken any notice whatsoever, of her lover's farewell salutation.

Stanislas de Güldenfeldt had indeed paid dearly for that one moment's happiness of the touch of Pearl's soft hand upon his cheek!

CHAPTER XII.

DANGER-SIGNALS.

Pearl was very silent and very pale during dinner. As for Amy, she simply waited, for she knew that in time her cousin must speak.

She was nevertheless hardly prepared for the manner in which the conversation at length opened.

The peaches were being handed round, when Pearl, glancing suddenly at the girl opposite to her, asked abruptly :—

"Amy, how was it that you went with Lord— with that man to-day—so far from home ?"

"I was taking a walk with him," replied Amy quietly.

"It seems to me that you accompany him very frequently in his walks, Amy. Ralph said the other day that he saw much less of you now-a-days than formerly, your time being so greatly engrossed by Lord Martinworth. This sounds very strange to me, considering the circumstances, and I think, dear, if you will forgive my saying so, you are playing rather a dangerous game."

Amy Mendovy did not reply for a minute.

while she made little heaps on the table with her bread crumbs.

"I think," she said at length, and the colour rose in her cheeks, "if another time Ralph finds that he has a grievance, it would be best if he complained to me, instead of confiding in other people."

"He didn't complain. He is far too loyal to do that, whatever he may feel," retorted Pearl. "But I saw he was looking worried and out of sorts, so I asked him what was wrong. If anyone is to blame, it is I."

For a time Amy seemed preoccupied. Then she said in a low voice:

"Pearl, surely Ralph—surely you—do not think that I—I am amusing myself with Lord Martinworth—that I am flirting with him?"

Pearl put her hand on her young cousin's arm, for by this time they had risen from the dinner table.

"I don't know what to think, Amy," she replied, with her grave, sweet smile. "This friendship seems so unusual, so—so strange."

"Nevertheless, it is easily explained," retorted Amy quickly. "I rather like Lord Martinworth, but only *rather*, for he is often very peculiar, very odd. I frequently find it difficult to make him out. But of one thing I am sure—I never felt quite so sorry for anyone in my life as I feel for him.

Pearl, that poor man is so desperately unhappy. He worships you. Of course, it is all very wrong, at least—I suppose it is. But I am sure it is natural enough. What is more, I believe, poor fellow, the worry is actually turning his brain. He does and says such strange things, Pearl, and is so morose. He has taken a fancy to me simply and purely because I am one of your belongings. And I, out of sheer sympathy—sheer pity—go for walks with him, and have tried as much as I can to cheer him up with my chatter and my nonsense. So now you understand. As for flirting, the idea is absurd. Why I never knew such a silent, abstracted man. But he seems grateful to me when I rattle along. And he brightens up a little at times. I thought I was doing some good for once in a way," she added plaintively, "but seem merely to have succeeded in placing myself in a false position."

Pearl merely sighed impatiently in reply. She wandered aimlessly about the room, then fidgetted with a piece of work, then opened a book, but, almost as quickly closed it. At last she took a lily from a flower vase and began abstractedly pulling it to pieces. Finally, she went towards her cousin, and placing her hand upon Amy's arm, glanced up into her face.

"Amy," she said almost inaudibly, "did you—did you see that awful, that terrible look that he—

that Lord Martinworth gave me to-day, when he came upon Stanislas and myself in the hut?"

"Yes," replied Amy, without hesitation, "I saw it, dear."

"Amy, I must tell you what I think. There—was—murder—in that look!"

Pearl's eyes grew round with fear. She hurt Amy's arm as she whispered these words.

"I felt it—I knew it," she added, "and it was the suddenness, Amy, of this overwhelming, positive knowledge that made me faint away."

"Hush, dear, hush!" replied Amy, putting both arms round her. "You are excited and nervous. Your nerves are unstrung. You know they never have been quite normal since your illness. You are apt, darling, to fancy and exaggerate things. You are thoroughly upset, Pearl. He simply looked angry and surprised, dear, as well he might, for, of course, he is ignorant of your engagement to Stanislas. Seeing you together in the hut—and—and—so affectionate—must have been his first inkling of anything out of the common."

"Amy," exclaimed Pearl, unlocking the girl's arms from about her waist, "you are not speaking the truth, and you know it. Don't you understand that I, who have known Lord Martinworth for so many years, have learnt by heart every look of his eyes, every expression of his features. And

do you for a moment suppose that I have ever seen that look, or anything like it, on his face before? Never! And I pray God I may never see it again. If I do, I know there can be no possible escape for me. For as surely as I am standing in this room, Dick Martinworth will kill me!"

At these tragic words Amy gave a little cry and her lips grew pale. Both women lapsed into gloomy silence, while Amy—once more placing her arms tenderly round her cousin, drew her out on to the verandah. They watched the moon in all her glory, lighting up with mystic glow mountains and woods and silent lake. The soft, mild light seemed to have a soothing effect upon Pearl's storm-tossed mind, for after a time she spoke more calmly.

"Of course," she said, with a long-drawn sigh, "it was very, very wrong of me, just because I was upset—half mad with fear—to behave as I did to poor innocent Stanislas. I cannot now understand how I could have called him—Stanislas—of all men—a coward. How I could have said those wicked things about his—killing—killing the other one. I did not know, Amy, I had it in me to be so hard, so unjust, so—so cruel. But lately I have discovered more than one detestable trait in my character unguessed before. Oh, dear, if you only knew how I hate and scorn myself, how cordially sometimes I wish I were dead!"

"If," replied Amy, alarmed at this fresh outburst, and speaking in her most calm and composed manner, "if you do not intend that Monsieur de Guldenfeldt should carry out your wish of killing Lord Martinworth, you had better perhaps, let him know without further delay that you have changed your mind. I believe people even in these enlightened days, still sometimes fight duels."

Pearl looked startled, then she sighed wearily, but made no reply. As the evening wore on she grew calmer and more collected. But she did not again refer to the subject, and by the time Amy left her, all traces of excitement and tears had vanished.

Stanislas de Guldenfeldt had returned home feeling thoroughly upset and distressed. Making every allowance that he reasonably could for the temporary excitement of an hysterical woman, he still found it difficult not to feel wounded at Pearl's behaviour, so uncalled-for and inconsiderate. Of late, he had more than once noticed an irritability and fractiousness of disposition, which before her illness had certainly been unknown to him. But this was the first time he had been treated to such an outburst as that which followed the unfortunate meeting with Lord Martinworth. Even that, considering the circumstances, he would have freely forgiven, for he knew that

women suffered from a malady called nerves, and at such times they were apt to do and say strange things. What however, he found it difficult to pardon and indeed to comprehend, was not only her air of chilly reserve, but the persistent ill-temper that Pearl had exhibited in the boat and even up to the actual moment of their parting on the shore.

Stanislas de Güldenfeldt had yet to learn that women's moods are incomprehensible in their uncertainty, inexplicable in their variety.

From Pearl's misdemeanours, de Güldenfeldt's thoughts flew to the ominous look witnessed on Lord Martinworth's face. In recalling it to mind, he was forced to acknowledge that the passion it expressed was simply diabolical. He remembered how this expression had staggered him as it crossed his vision, how his blood had boiled to think that such a glance should, even for one second, fall upon the woman whom he loved. In pondering over that look, and the circumstance that gave rise to it, de Güldenfeldt was seized with fury, and at that moment it was perhaps fortunate that Martinworth was considerably beyond the reach of the Swedish Minister's muscular arm. And yet, as Stanislas grew calmer, he realised the difficulty of going to the extremity of killing a man in a duel, simply because the expression of his face had been of an unpleasant nature, and had consequently displeased him.

He was still debating this question in his mind, wondering, as he puffed thoughtfully at his cigar, what steps could possibly be taken, and gazing in perplexity at the moon, which in its brilliancy seemed to mock at his lugubrious thoughts, when Sir Ralph Nicholson appeared on the verandah.

There was a suppressed discomposure and hurry in the latter's manner, and he was paler than usual.

"I say, de Güldenfeldt," he exclaimed, sinking into a cane chair, "we've had a devilish unpleasant thing occur at the hotel. Martinworth has all but cut his throat with his own razor."

"*Sapristi!*" exclaimed Stanislas under his breath, half-rising from his chair.

"The fellow for the time being was evidently as mad as a hatter," continued Ralph. "Fortunately for him, this charming little tragedy was enacted in his wife's presence. I've no notion what called it forth. There was a row between them, I suppose. But I have gathered from her that he suddenly rushed to the dressing table, and the next thing she saw was the gleam of the razor across his throat! She was up in a second, caught hold of the beastly thing as he was in the very act, had a tremendous struggle with him—she's a strong woman, you know—eventually secured it, and promptly pitched it out of the window."

"Good God! What a terrible business! Is the wound serious?"

"He was bleeding horribly when I rushed in. Their rooms are next to mine, you know, and through those thin partitions I heard the whole affair—the struggle, her screams, etc. I was just dressing for dinner. It appears, however, that the wound is not very deep. His plucky wife prevented that. Her hands are awfully cut about, too. But she's kept her wits, and hasn't broken down for a single instant."

"But what have you done with Martinworth?"

"Oh! he's calm enough now. And sane enough too, for the matter of that. Fortunately, there is an army doctor on leave from Hong-Kong staying at the hotel. He has bound up the wound, and says that both Martinworth and his wife will be all right in a few days. We've tried to hush the affair up as much as possible, but of course the story is bound to get about. The question is, de Güldenfeldt, what on earth are we to do with Martinworth?"

"You think he ought to be put into confinement?" enquired de Güldenfeldt with a quick look.

"Well, you see, a man who attempts his own life is supposed as a rule to be hardly responsible for his actions. Besides, I personally look upon the fellow as a dangerous animal. Who knows

but that the fancy may take him to attack someone else instead of himself? He has been awfully queer ever since he came up here, and I have not at all liked Amy being so much with him. She thought he seemed ill and unhappy, and kind-hearted little soul that she is, felt sorry for him. I blame myself now for not having sooner prevented this intimacy. But naturally I felt a certain delicacy at interfering in her friendships. But that's neither here nor there. What on earth are we to do with the poor fellow, de Güldenfeldt?"

The two men discussed the question until far into the night. Eventually what appeared like the right,—indeed the only solution,—was arrived at. They decided between themselves that as soon as the wound was sufficiently healed to allow of his removal, Lord Martinworth should be conveyed without delay to the General Hospital in Yokohama, in which place he could be detained in the necessary confinement until it was found possible to transfer him to England.

The plan was in every way a practical one. But in forming it, neither de Güldenfeldt nor Nicholson reckoned on the great opposition likely to be raised by one of the chief persons concerned, namely—the wife of the injured man.

The subject was approached by Ralph the next morning, who with that purpose in view, begged Lady Martinworth for a private interview. But

after a short time, looking pale and flustered, he rejoined de Güldenfeldt, who was smoking his cigar while waiting for him outside the hotel.

In emphatic terms he announced that never again would he undertake such a mission, for he had passed through one of the most painful, the most unpleasant half-hours ever spent in his life.

It appeared that after considerable hesitation and beating about the bush, Ralph came at length to the point. At first—he told de Güldenfeldt—Lady Martinworth did not appear to understand, but that when she finally grasped his meaning her anger was uncontrollable. She turned on Ralph, and positively white with rage, asked him how he dared to insult her and her husband—to say nothing of the family of Martinworth generally—with such an iniquitous proposition? She affirmed over and over again, in the most angry and positive terms, that Lord Martinworth was as sane as Ralph himself, that in fact, the action of the night before had merely been the result of a temporary mental disturbance caused by an unexpected shock, followed by great distress of mind.

"Of course," continued Ralph, "I have no notion to what she referred. And my belief is she does not know herself what was the cause or the nature of this shock. I ventured mildly to insinuate that such an unfortunate state of affairs

might recur, in which case the danger might not a second time be so easily averted. I was bound to point this out to her, but it was an unfortunate remark on my part, for on the strength of it, what the dickens do you think she did?"

"Go on," replied his listener. "What happened?"

"She caught me by the hand, dragged me across the passage, and would you believe it, before I caught on as to where she was going, ushered me straight into Martinworth's room! He—poor fellow—was lying on the sofa with his throat bound up, though he really did not look half as bad as one might have expected in the circumstances. I went up to him at once. But Lady Martinworth did not give me time to open my lips. 'Dick,' she cried, 'I have brought Sir Ralph Nicholson into your room for the express purpose of proving to him what he declines to believe from my lips—the fact that you are a sane man. He affirms that you were mad last night when this unfortunate accident took place, that you are still mad, and what's more, that you are likely to become worse as time goes on, and that consequently precautions must be taken. He comes here with a proposition which if not so insulting, would really be downright absurd. I expect you will have something to say in reply to both the accusations and the remedy proposed. Of course,

you must not talk, but write what you have to say on this,' and pushing some note-paper towards him, she cast a last furious glance at me, and then and there left the room.

"Well, you can fancy, de Güldenfeldt, I felt a bit of a fool standing there. Certainly my sentiments for Lady Martinworth for having deliberately forced me into such an unpleasant position were not of the most amiable description. My reasoning and accusations may have been perfectly correct, still naturally, no fellow likes being called a lunatic to his face, and I was quite prepared for any amount of anger or violence on Martinworth's part.

"However to my astonishment, he did not seem at all put out. In fact he looked quite agreeable, nodded and smiled, pointed to a chair, and began writing at once. Here's his letter. I confess, it doesn't look much like the production of a madman."

And Ralph extracted from his pocket-book a folded epistle, which he straightway handed to de Güldenfeldt.

"You are both right and wrong, my dear "Nicholson," it ran. "Last night I was as "mad as people who are thoroughly sick of "life and are determined to end it—generally "are. The mood, the desire for self-extinc- "tion, has however, passed. To-day I con-

"sider myself perfectly sane, as sane as you "are yourself. Indeed, I now realise that I "have a purpose before me, and until that "purpose is accomplished I can assure you I "shall make no further attempt on my life. "And, even when my object is fulfilled, I "really see no particular reason why I "should wish to disappear. Shall I not "then have reached the height of my "desires? Therefore, why should I wish to "die?

"But that is not the question now. "What I wish to explain to you is that there "is absolutely no reason whatever why I "should be shut up. For I presume it was "with that idea in your mind that you called "on my wife this morning? I perfectly "understand your view of the case. But *I* "*am not mad.* So you can go away, my "dear fellow, with the assurance that though "doubtless your intentions are excellent, they "are somewhat uncalled-for, and slightly "premature.

"Your decidedly amused,

"MARTINWORTH.

"Come and give me a look sometimes "I hope to be able to speak in a few days. "It will enliven me much to see your cheery "face."

De Güldenfeldt looked serious as he returned the letter.

"I cannot agree with you, Nicholson," he remarked after a minute or two, "in considering this communication the letter of a sane man. Taking his previous acts into consideration, I judge by this letter that he is more dangerously cracked than I even at first imagined him."

"In what way?" enquired Ralph.

"'My dear fellow, we all know the deepness and cunning of a madman. And in my eyes that letter is the acme of cunning. What, I should like to know, does he mean by a 'purpose before him?' What, I ask you, is that 'purpose?' Mark my words, my dear Ralph, it means some fiendish design, which, if the poor fellow were sane, would probably be as far from his thoughts or his intentions, as from yours or mine. Of course, nothing can be done without the sanction of his wife. But in my opinion, that man has no right to be at large. Let him work out his 'purpose' in an asylum if he likes. Not among the peaceful community of Chuzenji."

"Well, I don't see what is to be done," replied Ralph with a sigh. "I only hope your suspicions are unfounded, and that there may be no further bother with him. At any rate, perhaps it will be just as well to keep Amy away from him for the present."

"Yes, and above all—Pearl," remarked de Güldenfeldt darkly.

Stanislas was particularly thoughtful as after this conversation, he strolled towards Mrs. Nugent's house. He did not attempt to disguise from himself that he felt extremely anxious on her account. He could not get Martinworth's murderous look out of his mind. It haunted him each time with greater vividness and meaning, and the more clearly it imprinted itself on his vision, the firmer was his impression that it was the wild, vindictive, unreasoning look of a madman.

He still seemed worried and preoccupied when he appeared on Mrs. Nugent's verandah. That lady, glancing quickly into his face as he went towards her, naturally misconstrued the cause.

There were still moments when Pearl felt a certain shyness and dread of her future husband. The present was one of them.

She was paler than usual as she gave her cheek to be kissed.

"Stanislas," she said, still holding his hand, "I have been so ashamed, so unhappy at what occurred yesterday. I am consumed with remorse. Will you forgive me, dear?"

Recent events had obliterated Pearl's misconduct. Her words, however, recalled not only the annoyance, but the considerable distress of which

she had been the cause. De Güldenfeldt's glance, as it fell on her, was for once both cold and stern.

"If, Pearl," he said gravely, "you hope in the future to fill well your position as a Diplomatist's wife, the first lesson you must learn is to control not only your speech, but your temper. But let us say no more about it," and his face softened as his eyes rested on her repentant face and he took in all her dainty loveliness. "The man frightened you. You were nervous and unstrung, dear. Perhaps I was wrong to attach so much importance to your irritability, or to be hurt at your treatment of me. Certainly subsequent events have proved that you were to a certain extent justified in your alarm."

"What do you mean?" asked Pearl quickly.

"Put on your hat and I will tell you in the boat. There is a delicious breeze for sailing. It will take us straight to Senji."

It was only after much thought that de Güldenfeldt decided to tell Pearl what had occurred at the hotel. He was anxious not to increase her fears. On the other hand, he knew that she must hear the story sooner or later, and he concluded that it were better she should get the true facts from him than to have imparted to her from some outsider a garbled and exaggerated version. Also, he was anxious, without frightening her too much,

to impress upon her the great necessity for being on her guard, a task which, he knew, required both tact and delicacy.

Altogether, Stanislas felt that he had a difficult business before him. He was very desirous that Mrs. Nugent should leave Chuzenji without delay. He intended to use all his powers of persuasion to convince her of the necessity for such a step, and although he was prepared for many objections, he little reckoned on the total failure of his mission.

Pearl's steering was erratic, and her startled eyes looked brighter and bigger than ever, while she listened in silence to all de Güldenfeldt had to tell her. Hearing these distressing details was a truly dreadful ordeal to her. At each word Stanislas let drop, Pearl felt as if a knife was being thrust into her breast. For, if it were indeed true that Dick Martinworth were mad, Pearl instinctively knew that she alone was the cause of that madness. And as Stanislas' grave, calm words fell upon her ears, and the ghastly truth flashed upon her, that she—Pearl Nugent—had driven a man insane for love of her, she wept silently from very bitterness of soul.

So this was the sole result of her strivings, her flight of three years ago, her struggle for respectability and for virtue. So this—the mental collapse of a man, once famous for his brilliant

intellect, once noted for his calm impartial judgments—was the climax, to what she in her self-satisfied pride, had been wont to consider a fairly successful victory over manifold temptations, a triumph of entire self-control. It was but now, in obtaining cognizance of his supposed insanity, that Pearl fully appreciated the passionate, yet self-sacrificing nature of Martinworth's devotion. She realised at that moment, that it was this actual act of self-renunciation that had caused the present state of things, the unhinging of that once powerful mind. Her frame shook as this thought was brought home to her. That look of yesterday—everything—seemed to be explained in those three words, "He is mad." He was mad. And she told herself that it was she—Pearl Nugent—by her self-righteous, cold, calm virtue and superiority, who had driven him insane.

She looked out her eyes wide open with dumb misery, at the blue expanse of water before her. Her hand was leaning on the tiller, but she did not move it. De Güldenfeldt watching her tears, partly read and understood the remorse and agony of mind through which she was passing.

He touched her with his hand.

"Don't take it so hardly, dear," he said. "I daresay he will get all right again. Indeed, Nicholson thinks him so now, and you must remember, he is the only one of us who has seen

him since this awful thing happened. Don't you think you had better go away for a little, Pearl, until all this has blown over? You will get ill again if you worry so, if you take things so much to heart."

"Go away? What should I go away for? Where would you have me go?"

"Oh, up North,—anywhere. The Rawlinsons and I would of course, accompany you. You must get out of this place. You will get ill again. You badly want a change, Pearl."

"I want a change, when I have not been here a month? No! I have no intention of moving for the present. I am not ill, Stanislas. I am quite well. All I implore is not to be bothered—to be left in peace."

In spite of her petulance, de Güldenfeldt persisted for some time in his entreaties. Till finally Pearl, glancing up at him with an expression of bored surprise, informed him quietly but incisively that his arguments were a mere waste of breath, as she certainly had not the slightest intention of leaving Chuzenji, where she was so satisfactorily installed, until the hot season was over.

"Would you mind," she continued, "once more giving me your reasons why you are so particularly anxious for me to exchange my pleasant little abode here, where I am cool and

perfectly contented, for the discomforts of hot, stuffy tea-houses?"

The reasons were not repeated. At that moment the wind changed, and they had to put about. Later, when they were comfortably settled down again, Stanislas took a long look at Pearl's firm, little chin. Not for the first time was it borne upon the Swedish Minister's diplomatic mind, the utter uselessness, the complete futility, of trying to pursuade Mrs. Nugent against her will.

CHAPTER XIII.

HIDDEN FIRES.

Prophets of misfortune are apt to experience a decided sentiment of humiliation, perhaps a sneaking disappointment and regret, when their evil prognostications remain unfulfilled.

Monsieur de Güldenfeldt was, however, a pleasant exception to the rule. In spite of the catastrophe he had foretold, it was with genuine relief that as time went on, he proved to his own considerable satisfaction that the calm enjoyments of Chuzenji were as far as he could see, in no danger of being disturbed by the unmanageable presence of a lunatic at large.

After each meeting with Lord Martinworth—and they were necessarily many, for the invalid was soon about again, and in this charming but restricted mountain resort it is difficult to take a stroll without running across all the world—Stanislas confessed he could perceive no signs of the malady that he feared. Indeed, as time passed, and they met for at least a few minutes every day, he concluded that not only was Martinworth perfectly sane, but that he was certainly

in manner and in appearance more intelligent, more brisk and wide-awake than nine men out of ten. He had known Dick Martinworth for many years. But during the period of his former friendship he failed to recall those signs of vivid intellect and buoyant spirits, undeniable proofs of which were constantly now being brought before his notice.

It would seem as if the physical shock and pain of his attempted suicide, instead of injuring had on the contrary, acted as a tonic upon the moral stamina of the man. From the moment that he left his sofa he was to all outward appearances a changed individual. Whereas of late months, he had been morose and abstracted, gloomy, surly, and unsociable, he suddenly developed traits of quiet wit, constant good humour, charming affability, and such a desire for the companionship of his fellow creatures that it was not long before he attained the, perhaps scarcely enviable position of the most popular guest in the hotel.

He and his wife from this date, were constantly seen in each other's society, a fact in itself enough to strike those who knew him and the circumstances of his marriage with considerable wonder. She, poor soul, was consequently beaming with happiness. There were more than a few who were heard at this period of her existence, to call Lady Martinworth actually good-looking,

which shows what a contented mind can sometimes do for the improvement of homely features.

Pearl and de Güldenfeldt would, in their walks and expeditions, frequently run across the Martinworth couple apparently on the most excellent conjugal terms. They would stop and talk for a few minutes, and the meetings would pass off naturally and without unpleasantness. De Güldenfeldt would, nevertheless, give a sigh of relief each time these encounters were safely accomplished, for with the appearance in the distance of Martinworth and his wife, Mrs. Nugent would turn white and dismayed, and while clutching nervously at her *fiancé's* arm, her breath would come and go in short, quick gasps.

No sooner, however, was she actually in Lord Martinworth's presence than these signs of distress would disappear, and Pearl would behave with as much *sang froid* as any other woman of the world placed in similar circumstances. Indeed, it was an intense satisfaction to judge with her own eyes that, in spite of de Güldenfeldt's dreary prognostications, and indeed, in spite of her own personal fears, there now seemed no ground for their former gloomy apprehensions.

Lord Martinworth's condition was certainly, as far as she could judge, absolutely normal. Realising this, it was perhaps hardly a matter for wonder that Mrs. Nugent felt slightly humiliated

that so much wasted sympathy, such heart-rending remorse, had been conferred on one who, from all outward appearances, neither needed nor seemingly expected further consideration than is usually bestowed on a fellow creature temporarily incapacitated or indisposed.

She could not but appreciate—though once again she experienced a faint surprise—Martinworth's tact and delicacy in making no attempt to thrust himself into her presence. He had not called either before or since what was now generally spoken of as his "accident," and in recalling the dread she experienced when she first heard of his expected arrival at Chuzenji, of her fear of constant importunities, frequent visits, vain protestations, Pearl could not but smile—rather drearily and cynically, it is true—at these apprehensions, apparently so entirely uncalled-for, and premature.

Thus were the fears of all repressed and allayed. Lord Martinworth, as was only right and proper, devoted himself to his wife. Monsieur de Güldenfeldt was seldom absent from Mrs. Nugent's side, and Sir Ralph Nicholson, after a laughing remonstrance on Amy's part, at what she declared was a far too premature exhibition of masculine appropriation, was happy once more in the undisputed society of the girl he was to marry. The quiet, every-day life, the innocent, healthy out-door

pleasures of Chuzenji, pursued their natural and their agreeable course. Everyone seemed contented and at ease. There were no disputes, no excitements, no disturbances, and probably matters would have continued thus satisfactorily till the end of the season had it not been that one member of the little community was obliged to acknowledge that delicious dallying through those long, lovely summer days, and the enjoyment of charming society and the peaceful pleasures of the country were, alas! not the only ingredients that constituted life.

Stanislas de Güldenfeldt's official duties called him to the Capital.

He parted from Pearl with a lingering regret, tempered with an anxiety he did not attempt to conceal. At the moment of his departure, all his former fears of Martinworth which had been lying dormant for so many weeks were renewed, and the knowledge that he was leaving his future wife alone and unprotected induced him once more to urge upon her a temporary absence from Chuzenji. She, however, definitely refused to contemplate his proposal, and nothing he could say would move her from her decision. De Güldenfeldt was offered instead, one sole consolation. On the eve of his departure, he at last succeeded in extracting from Pearl a reluctant promise that their marriage should take place

shortly after the general return to Tokyo. This concession had, to a certain extent, relieved de Güldenfeldt's mind, for it was the first time since their engagement that Pearl—in spite of his many attempts—had allowed him to touch on the all-important subject of the date of their marriage.

Mrs. Nugent was wise enough to understand that it was necessary to concede something. She could not for ever be refusing her lover's every suggestion, every wish, and she reassured herself with the thought that it was now but the end of August. The middle of October still seemed to her a very long way off. Much might happen before then.

And so Stanislas rode off down the pass, partially consoled. It was only Pearl watching his vanishing figure from the tea-house to which she had accompanied him, who once more found herself recalling with a sickening dread that threatening look which for so long had haunted her nights and embittered her days.

For even as Pearl watched her lover from afar guiding his horse down the zigzag path, she felt again that strange feeling of coming evil that assailed her when de Güldenfeldt had proposed to her under the shadow of the Shogun's tomb. It attacked her now with renewed force. And some Power, which she could not explain, induced her to cry his name aloud.

He heard her, and turned in his saddle. Her tall figure, clad in a white gown, stood out clearly against a background of dark pines. Her arms were stretched towards him, and even at that distance he could distinguish the general fear and unrest enveloping her person.

"Stanislas," she cried, "come back to me. I want you."

He put his horse to a canter, and was soon by her side.

"What is it, my darling?" he said dismounting, and going up to her he took her two hands in his, and gazed steadily into her face.

"Stanislas," she whispered,—and she put her arms round his neck, hiding her head on his breast,—"forgive me, dear, for calling you back. But I felt so sad, so lonely, so frightened, and I wanted to tell you before you left how much—how very, very grateful I am, for all your goodness to me. I have never told you this before, Stanislas. But I felt I could not let you go without assuring you that I will try to prove my gratitude by being a good wife to you. I will indeed. No one has ever been so kind to me as you have been. No one has been so gentle, so tender, so forbearing. And yet *I* know I have often been trying, capricious, unreasonable. I have rewarded you but badly, darling, for all your kindness—your great goodness to me. Do you think me

very horrid, Stanislas?" and she looked up at him, her lovely eyes clouded with tears.

It is unnecessary to give Monsieur de Güldenfeldt's reply to this question.

Once more he rode down the path, his face aglow and his heart lighter than he had felt it for many weeks past. Whilst Pearl, sad and sorry, wended her way slowly home, and throwing herself on her knees by the side of her bed, burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

It was in this melancholy condition that Rosina found her half-an-hour later. Mrs. Rawlinson asked no questions. But she took her cousin in her arms, and kissed and soothed her, and stroked the tight little auburn curls that since Pearl's illness had taken the place of the magnificent tresses for which she had once been famous. She knew well enough what was troubling Pearl, for ever since her husband had opened her eyes, she for weeks had silently watched the struggle which she saw was being fought out within her cousin's breast. She deeply pitied her, but she understood that she could not force her confidence—that she must wait for her to speak. And now at length the moment had come. Ere long Pearl had unburdened her whole soul to the friend who had never proved her false. She told her cousin everything. Nothing was left unconfessed, from the moment that Lord Martinworth had once more

crossed her path, to her parting that day with Stanislas de Güldenfeldt.

And when she had finished a long silence ensued between the two women, for Rosina knew not what comfort to hold forth.

Pearl had shed all her tears, and with hands crossed upon her knees was gazing out with mournful eyes at the distant mountains and the blue, sunlit lake.

At last she spoke again in short sharp sentences. "Tell me, Rosina," she said, "what am I to do? How am I to marry Stanislas? I do not love him. I can never love him. I have tried so hard, and at one time when he asked me again I thought it would be so easy. Why do I not care for him? He is lovable enough, heaven knows! I dare not tell him that I cannot marry him. I dare not. I dare not. It would, I know, break his heart—that heart which is of pure gold. I had my chance to-day, when he insisted on my fixing the date of our marriage. But coward that I was, I left all that I ought to have said unsaid. Now I am in a worse position than ever. We are to be married in the middle of October. Oh! Rosina, what am I to do? Tell me, dearest, what am I to do?"

"There is," replied Mrs. Rawlinson, rising from her seat, and speaking very quietly, "only one thing, Pearl, to be done. If you feel

like this you must discontinue the engagement."

"I cannot, I cannot! I tell you it will break his heart. It will kill him. He is not a boy, and I don't think he has ever cared very much for anyone before. He is sacrificing much, I know, to marry me. Oh, Rosina! if you only knew how I like him, how I respect—admire him, take pleasure in his society—everything, but—love him. If he would only be satisfied with these things. But once we are married he will, of course, look upon my love as his lawful right, and oh! how shall I be able to endure it? How shall I, in these circumstances—yielding nothing—giving nothing—be able to live with him?"

"My dear Pearl," replied Mrs. Rawlinson, taking her cousin's hand between her own, and looking at her steadily with her clear brown eyes, "it is no good going over the same ground time after time. You must realise one thing. You must either make up your mind to marry Stanislas de Güldenfeldt, or else you must break if off *at once*. Now, if you feel that this marriage is impossible for the reasons that you give, you must have the strength of mind to write immediately, and put an end to the matter. He will suffer, but people nowadays do not die of broken hearts. Whereas if you marry, not loving him—obliged to live in daily intercourse fulfilling your duty as a

wife, your life will be a torture. He, of course, will soon understand what you are going through, and there will be unhappiness and misery on both sides. I repeat, if you feel certain, dear, that you can never give him that love that he will expect as his right, there is only one course to follow. It will, believe me, be kinder to him in the end. Stanislas de Güldenfeldt is not a man to be trifled with. He is not a man to rest satisfied with half measures. If I remained in your house a week, Pearl, I should only repeat the same thing. So good-bye, my darling. Be brave. Follow my advice, and write to him without further delay."

Mrs. Rawlinson pondered greatly as she wended her way homewards. She wondered much whether Pearl would be guided by her advice, and, knowing human nature fairly well, the conclusion at which she ultimately arrived was—that she would not.

"She will marry him," she thought, "and they will, I suppose, both be thoroughly wretched for the rest of their days. And I, who was so pleased at this match! Really, Pearl is very tiresome. Why on earth can't she be reasonably and comfortably in love like anybody else? But one can't alter one's disposition, I suppose. As things are, such a marriage for both parties concerned is simply suicidal. Dear me! how Tom

will chuckle when I tell him of this interview."

And he certainly did.

"This comes," he said, "of your mixing yourself up in such affairs. Didn't I tell you you would burn your fingers? Didn't I tell you, that though obstinate enough on certain points, on matters connected with her heart Pearl never knew her own mind two days running? And didn't I tell you that marriage number two would probably prove as great a *fiasco* as marriage number one? Never mind, my dear, you will meet with your reward, for in less than a couple of years you will probably have the delightful excitement of all the scandal of another divorce, or at least a separation. De Güldenfeldt is not a man to stand any damned nonsense, I can tell you."

Certainly, Mr. Rawlinson was an extremely annoying, disagreeable sort of husband. Such was Rosina's decided, and perhaps justifiable opinion at that moment.

Meanwhile, with regard to the writing of the proposed letter of dismissal, Mrs. Rawlinson was perfectly correct in her surmises. It was—though often enough commenced—never accomplished. Day after day Mrs. Nugent would make up her mind to put an end to the existing state of things, and day after day matters remained exactly as

they were. At last the time approached for the return of her future husband, and still the letter was unwritten. Pearl adopted the habit of indulging in long, solitary walks, and dejected rows on the lake, every day finding her more care-worn, paler and thinner, and Count Carlitti, who paid her many visits at this time, became more and more concerned about her state of health and loss of animation and good looks.

"I must tell you, *mon ami*," he said to Ralph in a moment of confidence, "I intended a week or two ago to declare myself. Because you know she is *une ravissante et charmante femme.* My heart did beat each time I did see her. Yes, I would have made her *la Comtesse Carlitti.* She was worthy of my name and title, and leetle fortune. But now, *que voulez vous?* her beauty fades. Every day it does vanish a leetle more, and perhaps—*qui sait?* one day she will become only a savage flower—no longer *une rose, la reine des fleurs.* So I have decided now, *mon cher* Nicholson, not to tell her of my honourable intentions. Do you not give me right?"

"Quite right," replied Ralph, "but I am sorry for her, poor thing. It will, you know, be a cruel disappointment."

Monsieur Carlitti, who was by no means the fool that some people gave him the credit for being, looked up sharply.

"Ah! *farceur!* now you do mock," he said. "I will no longer hesitate, but will ask her to-day. And to-morrow I will announce to you my wedding. *Elle est adorable!*"

"I do lofe you," he said to Pearl that afternoon, having to his great satisfaction found her alone in her little white drawing room. "I do lofe you *excessivement.* I have lofed you from the first day that I met you at *la fête de la Légation de France.* It will give me a happiness *immense* to make you *la Comtesse Carlitti.* I know that you are *une divorcée. Mais n'importe, vous êtes si belle et si séduisante.* And I do lofe you. That is enough. We shall make *trés bon ménage.* You will share with me my leetle fortune, and I likewise your fortune will participate with you. *Un arrangement bien commode.*"

Pearl never for an instant doubted but that the arrangement would indeed be extremely convenient, especially for the male participator thereof, her fortune being at least ten times larger than that of her admirer.

"I will suicide myself," he said mournfully, after she in all gentleness, but with a smile in her eyes which she vainly tried to suppress, had refused the honour of this noble alliance; "I will burn myself the brain. *Je suis trop malheureux.* For I had said to myself, '*cette belle Madame Nugent* is worthy of the ancient name of

Carlitti, and of my leetle fortune.' And now you do me decline. You do say 'No.' So I will suicide myself. Yes, I will go on the lake, *ce beau lac de* Chuzenji, and you—cruel one—will never, never see me more."

Not much anxiety was experienced by Mrs. Nugent at these threats of her volatile and flighty adorer. To no one did she mention the details of this interview, or the melancholy result of Count Carlitti's matrimonial attempt. As for Ralph, he was by far too kind-hearted to think of putting his sanguine friend to the torture of answering painful questions.

Indeed, the unusual droop of the finely waxed and pointed moustache, the plaintive look in the soft, brown eyes—and the general limpness and depression that for two whole days enveloped the person of the ordinarily vivacious little man, told their own sad tale.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Bird of Ill Omen.

Stanislas de Güldenfeldt, the subject of so much heart burning, was meanwhile, in the scorching heat of Tokyo, striving as speedily as possible to accomplish the business that had called him to the Capital. It was a tiresome affair that compelled appointments with Ministers and endless interviews with men of business, the latter frequently necessitating the presence of an interpreter —at the best of times a wearisome and tedious performance, and especially so when the thermometer marks, as it frequently did during that torrid summer—97° in the shade. In spite of his somewhat dreary occupations, there were many weary hours of enforced idleness, and the time had to be killed as best it could, a difficult operation with scarcely a creature—much less an acquaintance or a colleague—left in town.

Stanislas' love of reading and research seemed to be a thing of the past. His own life's drama struck him at this time as being so far more thrilling and absorbing than the perusal of any treatise or romance, or even the study of his

favourite scientific authors who—until now—had proved the great resource and stand-by of his lonely hours. He no longer had taste for these former delights, and though a once beloved volume might be taken from the bookshelves adorned by the work of many an ancient and distinguished author, instead of being dipped into, studied, or perused, it would remain for hours unopened on his knees.

Thoughts of Pearl, plans for the future, hopes for the future and—on frequent occasions—fears for the future, engrossed instead his mind. Mrs. Nugent's recent and fairly constant fits of irritability had by no means escaped the observation of de Güldenfeldt. Though, so far, he had hardly succeeded in fathoming the true cause of this strange and uncomfortable deviation in a disposition which—he was wont to flatter himself—he had after three years' study thoroughly solved—he, nevertheless, genuinely lamented the existence of these—until now—concealed and undreamt-of traits of character. More than once had he been brought into intimate contact with these uncertain and capricious moods. More than once had he suffered from these fits of nervous excitement, indulged in by one whom he hitherto had considered not only the sweetest and the best, but, above all, an unusually just and reasonable specimen of her sex.

He at times consoled himself with the thought that once married, once leading the daily routine of a calm and settled existence—Pearl would regain that former buoyancy of spirits, that previous equanimity of temperament which in his eyes, had constituted the greater part of her fascination and her charm.

He felt he had indeed achieved much in getting fixed the approximate date of the wedding. He recalled the sweet face which he had kissed so ardently when Pearl had summoned him back on the mountain pass, and the delicious words of love and repentance that in the fulness of her heart, with her arms encircling his neck, she then had uttered,—and his pulses beat, and once more his heart throbbed with joyful anticipation at the thought of that happiness which—he flattered himself—must surely one day be his lot.

He longed with an indescribable longing to be back to her. And it was with genuine relief that he saw the termination of his business approaching, and knew that those dreary days of enforced absence from her side must soon be reckoned as among the dark chronicles of the past.

It was the beginning of September and a most unusual season for the visit of the ubiquitous globe-trotter. Stanislas was therefore considerably, but none the less most agreeably, surprised, when one morning, just at the time he was feeling

his dullest and forlornest, a note was brought him from the Imperial Hotel, announcing the arrival—accompanied by a young son and daughter—of a former London friend, and a connection of his English mother's, a certain Mrs. Millward-Fraser.

> "We arrived in Japan by the last 'Em-
> "press' a fortnight ago" she wrote, "and
> "have since been hard at work doing the
> "sights of this most fascinating city. We
> "called at the Legation, but were told that
> "you were ruralising in the hills. Now we
> "hear that you have returned to Town, so we
> "allow ourselves to hope that you will look
> "in upon us one day soon. It will be so
> "pleasant to meet again, and to talk over
> "family news," etc., etc., etc.

Stanislas went promptly, that same day, to see his old friend. And an invitation to lunch at the Swedish Legation for the following morning was the outcome of the visit.

Mrs. Millward-Fraser had been reckoned a beauty in her day, and was still a very good looking woman. She was a widow, having lost her husband, an energetic and well-known M.P., a few years previously. Stanislas had known the family intimately during the years he was posted in London, and in those days was not only a valued friend of the elders, but an equal favourite with both boy and girl. Since those jolly days of romps

and fun, Alfred, the son, had emerged from Eton a cheerful, fairly well mannered, and fairly well educated, though somewhat raw stripling—while the daughter Muriel had developed into a bright and extremely pretty young woman, of which beauty she had indeed given full promise in her juvenile days.

"You bring it forcibly before my mind into what a regular old buffer I am degenerating," de Güldenfeldt remarked to the latter as they strolled into lunch, "and yet it only seems the other day since I nursed you on my knee."

"Nevertheless, it is ten years ago at the very least," laughed the girl. "I am seventeen now, and I am firmly convinced that I never permitted such a liberty after the age of seven or eight."

"And a nice fat lump you must have been even at that age. I pity poor cousin Stanny if he often indulged in the amusement of dancing you up and down on his knee," chaffed young Millward-Fraser, with brotherly politeness and candour.

"Alfred, it was impressed upon our minds by Mamma when we were children that personal remarks were considered particularly odious," retorted his sister. "Do you think me so very fat, cousin Stanislas? Ally is always teasing me and laughing at me for being what he calls, 'rotund.'"

Stanislas, thus appealed to, looked admiringly at the pretty plump girl beside him and laughed.

"You are perfectly enormous," he said; "a female Tichborne in fact. Fortunately there are, however, many men who, like myself, admire 'a little plump partridge.' Wait till you see Carlitti. He'll not hesitate long in falling a slave to your charms."

"Who is Carlitti?" enquired Mrs. Millward-Frazer.

"Count Carlitti is a colleague of mine. A dear fellow, and an immense admirer of your sex, and extremely susceptible in consequence. He is bound to lose his heart to Muriel, when he meets you all, as he will no doubt do later, at Chuzenji."

"Talking of hearts reminds me, Muriel, that we have forgotten the fortune-teller. You know we arranged to go there to-day," exclaimed Alfred.

"My dear children! such nonsense. He will only cram your head with fables," remonstrated Mrs. Millward-Fraser.

"Dearest mother, we have come here to study the habits and customs of the country. No one would dream of leaving Japan without visiting one of its famous soothsayers. Would they, cousin Stan?"

"I blush to confess, Muriel, that during all the

years I have lived in the East I have never, so far, penetrated into the sacred precincts of a fortune-teller's house," replied de Güldenfeldt as they seated themselves on the verandah, where coffee was served. "But then, you know, it is always the G.T.'s who see and do everything. We poor ignorant residents are very much behind the times, and are unacquainted with half the sights of Tokyo."

"Better late than never," said Muriel. "Come with us to-day. They are really marvellous people, you know. I have the address of a particularly clever one, much consulted by the Japanese."

"Isn't it rather hot for such exciting interviews?" feebly remonstrated Stanislas, knowing all the time that when once Miss Muriel took it into her pretty head to command, the sole thing was to surrender with a good grace. So, without further discussion, the carriage was promptly ordered.

In spite of the heat the young people were in the highest spirits during their drive, seeming greatly to enjoy the brightness and animation of the crowded streets, as the *betto*,* with his peculiar warning cry, cleared the way which led to the picturesque suburbs of the city. It was with regret when, after over an hour's transit, the

*Running footman

carriage stopped before a black wooden ancient gateway, and they knew that they had arrived at the entrance to the *Ninso mi's** domain.

"I feel as if I were leaving the Occidental, the modern existence behind me. It is all so old-world and weird," whispered Muriel to her mother, as they proceeded from under the gateway and entered the quaint, well-kept garden.

It was a lovely, poetical little garden, restful and secluded. Its many narrow paths were paved with grey pebbles, and in the centre of a plot of bright green turf was a miniature lake or pond edged with divers shrubs of various sizes and shapes. Uprising from the lake was a tiny island, on which flourished equally tiny and twisted maple, plum and cherry trees, shrined by one gnarled and quaint shaped pine, many centuries old. Floating on the surface of the little pond, and swaying gracefully in the summer breeze, were regal lotus plants, some bearing, amidst their glossy cup-shaped leaves, giant flowers of soft rose-pink, while other plants were crowned with marvellous white blossoms, standing erect on their long stems.

August is the month in which the lotus plants are in full and glorious flower, and the travellers were in raptures at the richness of growth, their delicate loveliness, as their eyes rested on

*The name given to a class of fortune-teller.

this entrancing and, to them, unknown sight. The party lingered long on the large flat stones that forming a natural bridge, traversed the pond, gazing with unbounded admiration at these unrivalled bell-shaped flowers. The colossal leaves of green almost as striking as the lovely blossoms themselves, were full to overflowing of glistening dewdrops, that sparkled like diamonds in the afternoon sun, as the plants swayed gracefully above the water with every breath of the quiet air.

The Millward-Frazer family at length tore themselves away from admiring these lovely blossoms and left the garden. The party passed through the grotesquely carved porch of the old-fashioned building, with its many gabled, peaked Chinese roof, and were received by a servant, who, after greeting them kneeling and with her forehead touching the threshold of the doorway, rose, assisted in taking off their shoes, and finally ushered them into a fairly sized Japanese room. The *shoji* were wide open, acting as a simple frame to the picturesque garden without, its gnarled and twisted trees, its ancient stones and lanterns, and its pond of slumbering lotus blooms.

In the middle of the matted room, which—with the exception of the little shrine before which the evening and morning prayers are offered up—was

almost devoid of furniture, was a square lacquer table that rose about a couple of feet from the floor, and on which was piled a heap of ancient volumes. Before the table, with huge horn spectacles perched on his nose, and with a glistening and entirely shaven pate, was squatting on his heels, a wrinkled and solemn looking Bonze of benign countenance, holding upright in his hand a partly opened fan. He was adorned in the richest vestments of purple silk, which stuck out in stiff, straight lines around his bending body.

As each of the visitors filed in, filling the little room, the old priest from behind his great round spectacles examined them from head to foot with the piercing eye of an eagle. His glance finally fell and rested on the interpreter of the Legation, a young man whom Stanislas had recently appointed to fill the post left empty by poor Suzuki's tragic death.

From studying the impassive face of Ito, the old man's eyes travelled to de Güldenfeldt, on whom they remained, though the latter made vain attempts to keep himself as far as possible in the background.

The Bonze, never once taking his eyes from Stanislas, murmured something to Ito in a low and impressive manner.

"The *Ninsomi-san* says he wishes to interview you first," Ito said, turning to his master. "He

has something of the utmost importance to say to you."

"Nonsense," replied de Güldenfeldt impatiently. "He can have absolutely nothing to say. Why, it is impossible for him to know even who I am. Besides, I pay no attention to such things, and have no intention whatsoever of having my fortune told. Miss Millward-Fraser wishes to hear her fate. He will speak to her."

The message was transmitted, and the old man, mournfully nodding his head, said the *Danna sama** should be obeyed; but that later he would himself be the first to regret the unnecessary delay. He begged humbly to be allowed to say what he had to say to the *Danna sama* immediately after he had spoken to the *O' Jo-sama*.†

Muriel thereupon knelt on the floor in front of the table, and the old Seer, wrinkling up his face and closing his narrow eyes, devoid of eyelashes, mumbled and muttered incantations between his toothless lips. She held out the palm of her hand. He did not even glance at it, but lifting the divining rods reverentially and solemnly to his forehead, he for a moment leant his forehead in deep thought on-to the table, always muttering and groaning to himself. After this performance he slowly raised his bald old head looking at Muriel

*The honourable master.

†The honourable young lady.

with a quick and comprehensive glance. He next enquired her age, and reckoning by the Japanese signs of the Zodiac, he parted the divining rods into two bundles, then taking up the magnifying glass, he examined intently the lines of the face. So intently and so long indeed did he gaze as to considerably embarrass poor Muriel, who blushed furiously under this prolonged examination of her features. He seemed apparently satisfied with this inspection, for a grim smile gleamed from his cunning old eyes, and he proceeded to count the number of twigs in each of the already separated packets of divining rods. Then once more he took the magnifying glass, and carefully re-examining her face he spoke, pausing every now and then to allow the interpreter to translate his prophecies.

"You have," he mumbled in a low monotone, interspersed with various "oh's" and "ah's," and a curious hissing sound between the wrinkled lips, "you have crossed many miles of water"—("I could have told you that," whispered Alfred Millward-Fraser, "without having the honour of being a Japanese soothsayer")—"but you will not cross it again for many months, and perhaps years."—("Why, we are returning home in three months," continued the irrepressible youth.)—"In a few days you will travel to a country high in the hills, a beautiful fertile country, where

there is much water and beautiful vegetation, but a dangerous and difficult journey over rocks and fallen trees and broken bridges. You will meet a male, a stranger, on the road, and before two months have passed and gone, you will have told that man that you will become his wife. The ninth month and the tenth month of this year of Meiji will be your most fortunate months. They will bring you much happiness. You will have a long and happy and healthy life, for your pretty face is likewise a lucky face, and much money and many children and good fortune will be your lot. I have spoken."

The young girl's eyes were sparkling with excitement and merriment as she rose from her lowly seat.

"How wonderful it is," she exclaimed. "I am actually to meet my fate in a few days. Do you hear, Ally? you, who are always scoffing and telling me I shall never succeed in securing a husband."

"Bosh! I bet you ten dollars, Muriel, it is all humbug," said Alfred, boy-like, ashamed to show how much impressed he was.

"No doubt. But what delightful humbug, nevertheless. Now, Cousin Stanny, it is your turn. He is looking at you all the time. He evidently finds you by far the most interesting member of the party. I am sure I have suffered

by this absorbing interest, and that he has cut my fortune short in consequence."

"Very well, to please you, Muriel," replied de Güldenfeldt with a smile. "But pray don't run away with the notion that I for one instant believe in this nonsense. Alfred is right. It is all humbug from beginning to end. I sacrifice myself on the sole condition that your mother promises to be the next victim."

Mrs. Millward-Fraser smiled rather sadly and shook her head. "I live in the past, not in the future," she said, as de Güldenfeldt, folding up his long legs as best he could, squatted down in front of the little table, and prepared himself to be scrutinized.

This time, however, the Seer employed neither magnifying glass nor divining rods. He looked steadily at Stanislas for a few minutes with his penetrating black eyes. Then turning to the interpreter he spoke rapidly, in a low sing-song voice, charging his monologue with many ominous shakings of the head, and with dreary groans and sighs.

"Well, Ito, what does he say?" asked de Güldenfeldt, when the old man, ceasing to speak, leant his head on the table in a state of breathless exhaustion. The interpreter hesitated.

"Pardon me, your Excellency, but he says many bad, many false things. Do you wish me to repeat them?"

"Certainly," and de Güldenfeldt laughed rather uneasily, "let us hear everything. Keep nothing from me, false or true, good or bad."

"In what he says there is no good, no truth, Excellency. It is all bad, all false words. He says that you must hasten away up into the hills. He says the wind is rising, that it is already beginning to sing in the trees, and that there will be a great and terrible storm. The storm in the mountains will be a raging tempest, very, very dreadful and destructive. He says that one whom you love will be in the midst of it, at the mercy of the wind and of the waves, and what is worse, at the mercy of a man who is mad, of a man who hates you with a great and bitter hatred. You must go to her, Excellency, he says, if you ever wish to again see the honourable and gracious lady whom you love. Every moment is precious. There is not a minute to be lost, you must hasten —hasten. Soon it may be too late. For the wind is already beginning to sing drearily in the eaves of the house, and the raindrops are already overflowing from the cups of the lotus leaves."

And truly, as Ito spoke, a violent gust of wind shook the woodwork of the little house, and huge rain drops splashed into the lake outside.

Stanislas had turned pallid at Ito's interpretation of the old soothsayer's mumbled words. For, in spite of all his former professions of incredulity,

it was impossible not to be strangely and alarmingly impressed at the unhappy forebodings contained in this ominous prophecy.

The mountains—the woman he loved—the madman, what and who else could they mean but Chuzenji—Pearl—Martinworth? He did not pause to ask himself how the old Bonze, living buried in his little wooden house, miles away from any European, could have obtained knowledge of who he was, or of his intimate concerns. There was a mystery, a weirdness in the whole strange proceedings, that baffled investigation, or defied analysis. Perhaps at some future time he would try and solve the problem. But for the present he was consumed with an unquestionable and confident belief that the Seer's warning permitted of no discussion—that what he foretold was indeed occurring or about to occur, and that Pearl, the being whom he loved most on earth, was in some great danger, was helpless and alone, and what was more, was needing him.

A merciful Providence in the form of a giddy girl had guided his footsteps to this distant neighbourhood and house. By these unforeseen and unexpected means he had been warned of this danger threatening the woman who was to be his wife. And not for one instant did Stanislas, the contemptuous sceptic of half an hour ago—the practical product of a practical age—hesitate, or

think of ignoring this warning delivered in so unusual a manner, from so unthought-of and so strange a quarter.

"Ask him," he said to Ito, "if the danger is imminent, and if it can by any possible means be averted?"

Ito put the question.

"He says, Excellency, that you must hasten, hasten with all possible speed if you wish to see the lady again. But he will not, he says—he cannot, say more."

Stanislas glanced at his watch. It was past five o'clock.

"Ito," he said, "is there another train to Nikko to-night?"

"No Excellency, the last one left at three o'clock."

"But there is one I know shortly for Utsunomiya. I will take that, sleep the night there, and get up to Chuzenji early to-morrow. Thank God! I am near the station here. Ito, you will take these ladies and this gentleman back to the hotel, go to the Legation, get me some clothes, and follow me by the first train to-morrow. Now call me a *'ricksha* at once. I have just time to catch the train."

The Millward-Frasers had been silent and inactive, but deeply interested and distressed spectators of this scene. They saw that their friend,

restrained and composed though he was in manner, was possessed not only with the very greatest anxiety, but likewise with an overwhelming dread. They longed to be of help to him, but knew not how.

He turned to the elder lady, "You will forgive me," he said, "leaving you thus unceremoniously. But I look upon that old man's words as a warning sent from heaven. I feel that not only are they not to be ignored, but that they must be obeyed. And what is more, obeyed without delay. One whom I love, who is to be my wife in a few months time, is—according to this old man—in imminent danger, and I must reach her, and go to her assistance as speedily as lies in my power. Listen to the wind and rain! Good God! the first part of his prophecy is already coming true."

"Can we help you, dear friend? Do anything for you at the Legation? Give any message?" asked Mrs. Millward-Fraser with tears of sympathy in her eyes.

"You can do nothing, dear Mrs. Millward-Fraser, but pray for me in this the moment of the greatest distress, the greatest agony of my life. Stay, I will on second thoughts, take the carriage. It is quicker, and the rain is coming down in torrents. I will send it back to you, and also Ito, who will return and see you safely home. Adieu!"

And he was gone!

CHAPTER XV.

'Twixt Scylla and Charybdis.

It was two or three days before Monsieur de Güldenfeldt's proposed return. And Pearl knew that if her letter of rupture was to be sent at all it was necessary to write it without further delay.

For over an hour she had been sitting at her writing table with the blank paper before her. The atmosphere was heavy and close, signs of a coming storm. Her head was aching, and her sight dimmed with the pain.

Finally, after merely inscribing a few words, she impatiently threw down her pen, and, pushing the writing materials aside, she rose from her seat.

"There will be ample time to catch the post when I come in," she thought. "My head is splitting. I shall die if I don't have some air."

The sun was covered, but this by no means prevented the heat from being stifling as Pearl plodded along the path that overhung the lake. Her feet lagged somewhat, but her thoughts on the contrary, followed each other in rapid succes-

sion, and as she trudged through the undergrowth she found herself recalling many incidents of her past life. That unaccountable feeling of misery and depression, that so often weighs down the spirits before the coming of a typhoon, possessed Mrs. Nugent this afternoon. This sentiment of melancholy did not strike her as anything out of the way, for it was indeed many a long day since Pearl had known what it was to feel really happy or light-hearted. She found her eyes filling with tears of self-pity as she walked to the border of the lake, and leaning against a tree, gazed down sadly into its depths.

After all, she drearily thought, what a long incessant struggle had been her life. What a small, what a very small iota of happiness had fallen to her lot. Pearl buried her face in her hands, and wondered if, in any way, she had brought these misfortunes on herself—if, indeed, it had been through any fault of her own that everyone whom she had trusted and loved had proved false in the end, that everything she had believed in had eventually turned to ashes in her hands.

She thought of herself at the time of her marriage—bright, and sunny, and single-hearted, believing in everybody who was kind to her and in everything that pleased her. She remembered how this credulity, this innocent faith in all that

was best in human nature, had blindly centred itself in the husband whose utter worthlessness, before many months were passed, was the cause of a cruel awakening from this beautiful dream of pure belief, resulting in disillusion, and in a bitter lesson thoroughly learnt.

She recalled the wretched years that followed this discovery of Mr. Norrywood's real disposition. Then she thought of Martinworth, and how he had come into her life, to transform its misery into an unsatisfied, restless excitement, which, at the time, she blindly deceived herself was happiness. From Martinworth her thoughts turned to the sweet widowed mother, who had died before she left school, but whose example and teaching had remained implanted in her mind, and was the means of keeping her honest and pure through many a bitter moment of trial and temptation. Pearl loved to think of her mother. For long she let her thoughts linger round this guardian angel of her youth. It was a relief to turn them away from herself, and to recall that tall, stately figure, with the large grey eyes, so like her own, the soft voice, and the grave, sweet smile.

She sat down on a moss-grown boulder, and dwelt tenderly on all the past incidents of her merry childhood, and trusting, early girlhood. And when at length she rose, and once more con-

tinued her walk, Pearl Nugent's thoughts had taken a new and a happier turn.

She wandered on, lingering here and there, and occasionally plucking some of the many ferns and wild flowers that grew by the path. Her eyes travelled upwards and alighted, at some distance above her, upon a plant she had long desired, a magnificent specimen of the *Osmunda regina*. Pearl paused in her walk, and found herself speculating as to how greatly this giant fern would adorn her rockery, one of the many beauties of her lovely garden. Finally, with some difficulty, she succeeded in clambering up the steep upright bank, and regardless of the rising wind and the rain that now began to fall, she attempted to loosen the plant, and, for want of a better instrument, commenced digging with her fingers at the roots.

Mrs. Nugent little knew that she had a solitary but interested spectator of her proceedings. Martinworth, in his boat on the lake, had caught the flutter of a white dress through the trees, and, with his keen sight, it did not take him long to distinguish that the owner of the dress was Pearl. He shipped his oars, and bending forward watched with absorption the efforts to uproot the fern. He had not long been thus silently employed when, to his astonishment and dismay, he saw her jerk suddenly backwards, and, sliding

rapidly down the bank, disappear from view in a cloud of earth and stones.

The plant that at one time seemed so firmly and obstinately embedded in the ground had, without warning, become loosened, and Pearl, in giving one final pull, found herself thrown with violence and unexpected impetus upon the path.

Her fall was not from any great height. Though dazed for a minute by the suddenness of her collapse, she was preparing to rise from her lowly position when, in attempting to stand, a sharp pain in her right ankle was an unmistakeable and alarming proof that her foot was sprained. With dismay and a smothered cry she fell back again on the ground.

To make matters worse, the wind was rising every minute, and the rain, increasing in force, was penetrating the foliage overhead. Pearl made a supreme effort to drag herself up by catching at the branches and the brushwood, but the pain of her foot was so intense that, greatly to her annoyance, she found herself forced to desist from her efforts.

The path was an unfrequented one. And it was hardly a consoling thought that a night spent in a dripping wood, with a possible typhoon thrown in for company, was likely to prove the result of her adventure. Indeed, this anticipation was so little congenial to Pearl that she once more

made a final effort to rise, the consequence being that, certainly for a minute or two, she lost consciousness from the pain.

She was aroused from this partial lethargy by a rustling of the leaves, and the next minute the form of Lord Martinworth emerged from behind the trees.

On any other occasion Martinworth's sudden appearance would have filled Mrs. Nugent with the greatest dread and consternation. Her present position was, however, proving so extremely unpleasant that, forgetting all fears and past disagreeableness, she found herself, on the contrary, hailing his unexpected arrival on the scene with intense relief.

"Thank goodness! you have come," she exclaimed, as her face brightened. "I have been very unfortunate, and in falling have sprained my ankle. I am quite helpless, and unable to move."

Lord Martinworth gazed down at the recumbent form for a few seconds in silence. Then he said:

"You seem indeed to be in a sorry plight. The only thing I can suggest is that I should carry you to my boat. I have got it moored close by," and, without waiting for a reply, he stooped down and gently lifted her in his arms. "I will row you home," he added. "Put your arms

round my neck," and Pearl found herself obediently following his directions.

It was with considerable difficulty, hampered as he was by a burden by no means slight, that Martinworth succeeded in threading his way through the undergrowth. The climb down the steep uneven bank was long and most laborious.

He was breathless when he at length deposited Pearl by the edge of the lake.

"I must wait a moment," he panted, "before I attempt to lift you into the boat. The lake is fearfully rough, and my little cockleshell is not made for bad weather. We shall have to keep by the shore. You are not afraid?" and he looked down at her with a strange light in his eyes.

Pearl hesitated a moment.

"No," she said at last, "I don't think I am afraid, at least, not very much. But I want to get home as soon as possible. I have to write a letter that must absolutely go by this evening's post."

Lord Martinworth looked at her fixedly, but said nothing. And once more he stooped down and lifted her in his arms.

It was no easy matter to place Pearl into the little outrigger which was dancing like a cork on the water, that from a calm and sunny lake had in so short a time become transformed into a rag-

ing sea. Twice he missed his footing and nearly fell, and twice he recovered himself, while Pearl clung tightly to him, and felt his heart beating against her own. The rain had ceased for the moment, but the wind raged in greater fury than ever, and it was already getting dusk. Lord Martinworth's third effort, however, proved successful. Depositing Pearl in the stern of the boat, he took off his coat and made a cushion for the injured foot.

"It will be an endless, a terrible business getting back," he said. "Don't stir. For as it is, it will be all I can do to keep the boat from upsetting. Steer as near the shore as you can."

Pearl silently obeyed his directions, while Lord Martinworth worked manfully at the sculls.

The boat, as he truly said, was not intended for rough weather. Pearl soon realised this fact as it danced up and down, backwards and forwards, and the water came dashing over bow and stern.

At first the pair were silent, for all Martinworth's breath was required for the effort of sculling against the wind. But at last, during a lull in the storm, his eyes wandered to his companion's face and remained fixed there with a steadiness of gaze which Pearl found anything but reassuring.

"The wind is abating," he finally said. "It is fortunate, as I wish to ask you something, Pearl."

Mrs. Nugent did not reply, but her heart sank within her.

For some moments Lord Martinworth still rowed on, while it seemed as if his words were likely to be verified. Though the roughness of the water still tossed the helpless little boat, the wind had temporarily almost dropped.

"We can drift in safety, now," he said, and shipping his oars, he leant toward Pearl.

"Pearl," he said very gently, "I want you to be true. I want you to frankly answer one or two questions which, considering our former friendship, I consider I have more than a right to ask. First of all," and he paused a moment, "I wish to know, do you still love me, Pearl?"

The question came abruptly. Mrs. Nugent was suffering considerable pain, and was feeling very angry and rather frightened. She for a moment forgot the past,—the devoted intercourse of former years—everything but the present trying situation,—and her answer without hesitation was sharp and hard.

"You have no right whatsoever to ask me such a question. And you know it. It is an action unworthy of you, to take advantage of my helplessness, to place me in such an extremely unpleasant position. But as you have thought fit to question me, I will not be such a coward as to shirk the answer. No, Dick, I certainly do not

care for you any longer. All that is passed. My sentiments have—have—changed. I can only thank God that all that folly is over."

The words had hardly left Pearl's mouth before she bitterly regretted them. She knew they were harsh and cruel, and she was grieved indeed when she saw the change that came over Lord Martinworth's face that she had let her sharp tongue and irritable temper get the better of her.

He winced as if she had struck him, and his cheeks turned white beneath the sunburn.

"Thank you," he replied with bitterness. "You are certainly carrying out my request to the letter, and are frank enough. So this is the reward for the devotion of years. Well! your answer explains many things," he added musingly. "First of all I learn, that not only do you not love me now, but what is more, that you never really cared for me, never loved me as I loved you. I was a blind fool not to have understood that fact many years ago. You gave me proofs enough, God knows."

"I beg," retorted Pearl, but in a gentler tone, "that you will not discuss this question, Dick. Did you not promise to bury what has gone? Why move these gravestones of the past? Will you not continue rowing? The wind is rising again. I have nothing on but this thin, white

gown, and I am cold and very anxious to get home."

"No," answered Martinworth sternly, "I will not go on rowing for the present. When I made that promise the situation was entirely different. You were not then—then—— I have another question still to ask. May I request that you will give me as frank a reply to my second question as you did to my first?"

Mrs. Nugent remained silent. She shivered and looked anxiously towards the fast darkening shore.

"I am really sorry to inconvenience you," continued her companion, "but it is absolutely necessary for the purpose that I have in view that these questions should be answered clearly, frankly, and without delay. In fact it entirely depends on the nature of the replies I receive whether I carry out that purpose or not."

"I don't know what you are talking about," replied Pearl petulantly. "I am miserably cold and wet. My foot is paining me very much. Only get me home, and I will answer as many questions as you please."

"Pardon me. One more question at least must be answered now. But I will not delay you long. Pearl Norrywood"—he unconsciously used her former name—"as you one day expect to stand before the Throne, tell me the truth. I must—I

will know the truth. Are you or are you not engaged to be married to de Güldenfeldt?"

As Martinworth uttered these words he leant further forward, gazing intently at Pearl.

Mrs. Nugent did not respond. She flushed, her eyes falling beneath her companion's penetrating glance. Fortunate indeed that she averted them for a time. Thus for a short period, was she saved the sight of the wildness of expression that slowly crept over the face of her companion, as the question brought forth no immediate reply.

Mrs. Nugent continued silent. It was not from any desire to prevaricate or to avoid telling the necessary truth that she hesitated. But at the moment that the question was asked, so sternly and so impressively, it struck her like a blow how very different might have been the answer if her letter to de Güldenfeldt had been written and despatched, instead of being still to write. She began to realise, to dread, that this one act of procrastination—vacillation—weakness of mind—whatever it might be called—was likely to be productive of calamitous results, feared and foreseen for weeks.

As this thought passed through her mind she instinctively raised her eyes to Martinworth's face. That one glance was sufficient to impress on her the certainty that she was in the presence, not only of a madman, but of one who, with the

premeditation, vindictiveness and ferocity of his type, was she was firmly convinced, contemplating her speedy destruction.

Strange to say, the conviction of this fact caused her no immediate terror. Though of a naturally timid and nervous temperament, Pearl, at this moment of terrible and full assurance, felt none of those depressing fears that had assailed her of late with such crushing and ceaseless persistency. She knew now, that from the moment she had seen that look in Martinworth's eyes weeks ago, she had been preparing herself for that fate which she had then told herself must surely one day overtake her. She was alone on a stormy lake with a man no longer master of himself or of his actions. The wind, which had risen again, was tearing round in circles, the rain was dashing in their faces, and the little boat was helplessly tossing first one side and then the other. She looked up and saw the angry heavens, she looked down and saw the angry waters, she looked before her and saw what was far more terrible than either—the angry eyes, wild and threatening, fixed upon her face. And yet Pearl felt no fear. Not for one moment did she contemplate the thought of hiding the truth by vain subterfuges, of cloaking it by prevarications. She knew that in time, all in good time, an answer must be given. And she likewise knew that that answer would seal her fate. She

only wanted a short moment, a little space to think. Not to weep over herself or bemoan her own destiny, for an overwhelming pity for the man before her, a deep compassion, took the place in Pearl's breast, for the time being, of all natural feelings of terror and dismay. It was her firm conviction that this man, who had once been her tender and adoring lover, was in a short space of time about to become her assassin, and she asked herself, as she gazed into his terrible face, what must not have been his sufferings of late, that a transformation such as this should have taken place in the once gentle, well-balanced and affectionate nature. As Pearl sat there, looking silently and unflinchingly into those eyes, her individuality for the moment seemed merged into Martinworth's. Now for the first time did she truly realise the misery and the despair that had gripped his soul when, without a murmur, that evening in Tokyo he had left her, resigning all claim upon her for ever. The strain caused by this voluntary renunciation of the desire of years had, she knew well, proved too great for the highly-strung, nervous disposition, and the will, once under such calm self-control, the brain, once so superior, had ultimately collapsed under this last final effort of supreme self-denial.

This tragic and undoubtable fact was brought vividly before her as she continued to gaze back

into those eyes. She had retained her own self-respect, she had acted up to the principles of her youth, she had kept intact the promise she had made—but—but—on the other side, she had broken a heart, she had ruined a happy and a useful life, and above all—she had unwittingly driven a man mad for love of her! And in agony of mind, Pearl asked herself the question, had she done right? Oh! had she done right?

And all this time, while Lord Martinworth's inquiry remained unanswered, his face was growing more terrible, the steely blue eyes more bloodshot.

"Answer me," he said, and he leant forward and caught her by the wrist. "Are you engaged to de Güldenfeldt? Do you hear me, Pearl? Answer me!"

At the contact of his hand on her wrist, Pearl drew back and shuddered. She at last felt her nerves giving way under the tension. And she was aware that all feelings of self-reproach, regret, and compassion were becoming submerged in a more natural sentiment—that of genuine terror for her own safety. She looked despairingly around her, and saw with horror and dismay that they were drifting towards the river that led to the waterfall. The current was swift and strong at that place, and she well knew that if Martinworth did not at once take the oars it would merely

be a matter of minutes before they were dashed over the brink into eternity! The knowledge flashed upon her as they sped nearer and nearer to the fatal spot that this was the end that from the moment he had lifted her into his boat he had decided upon. Again Pearl shuddered, as her eyes fled once more to his face, and she knew that further delay was impossible, and that she must speak.

"Dick," she replied, "you will kill me. I know it. I read your intention in your face. You loved me once, Dick, but now your love has turned to hate. It is clear enough. Your hate is so bitter that you will kill me. But I have never told you a lie and I will not die with one on my lips. Yes, I—I am engaged to Monsieur de Güldenfeldt, but I am not——"

The sentence remained unfinished. Martinworth waited for no more. He started from his seat, and shouting wildly, so that his ringing voice was heard far above the roaring of the wind and the waters: "Never, Pearl! Never! Mine at least in death," he stretched his arms towards her, tore her from where she was crouching on her seat, and clasped her to him. For a moment they stood thus, locked in each other's arms, tottering with unsteady feet in the fragile boat, while he gazed with all the frenzy of insanity into her white face. Then as his eyes lingered on

hers, large with terror and despair, his sinister intentions appeared to soften, for a change, sudden and complete, passed over his face, transforming the wild glare of madness into a look of grief, despairing sorrow and reproof—sad and mournful in the extreme. He stooped down, let his eyes dwell on hers with the adoring look of old, kissed her once tenderly, almost reverentially, on the forehead, and replacing her as gently upon her seat as he had torn her roughly from it, Lord Martinworth balanced himself for one second on the edge of the boat, then plunged headlong into the seething lake!

One stifled cry mingled with the fury of the wind as, with the violence of Martinworth's movement, the little craft upset, and Pearl Nugent, precipitated into the water, was hurled through the rushing current, and carried helplessly towards the waterfall!

CHAPTER XVI.

"IT IS BEST SO, AMY, DEAR."

And all through that dreadful night raged one of the most terrible and disastrous typhoons that had visited Japan for many years. Mrs. Nugent and Lord Martinworth, not returning to their respective domiciles, an immediate search was instituted, but as the darkness deepened the wind and rain increased in fury. It was a sheer impossibility to stand up against the raging gale, and eventually the hopeless search had to be temporarily abandoned. In that one night the lake rose six feet, huge landslips descended from Nantai-san, and bridges and roads and dwellings were washed away and demolished, as if mere sheets of paper.

As dawn approached the torrents ceased, and the wind abated.

At length the sun rose in full glory, casting in brilliant irony its penetrating rays over this grievous scene of waste and desolation. And mingling with the foliage of a great tree blown across the still raging stream the auburn tint of

Pearl Nugent's hair shone like red gold among the green.

On the upsetting of the boat she had been borne down the torrent. A few seconds more and she would have been dashed over the rocks, hundreds of feet high, which form the cascade. But some hours before, during the fury of the storm, a giant pine tree had fallen with a deafening crash half across the stream. It was that tree that saved Pearl from a watery grave, for wedged, as in a vice, between a fork of its branches, her bruised, unconscious form was ultimately discovered. Her head and shoulders were out of the water, and the rushing stream, instead of loosening, had apparently been the means of entangling only more securely the rent and dripping garments to the branches of the tree. From the bank could be seen her head, with its ashen face and closed eyes, thrown back and pillowed, as it were, upon a wealth of green foliage, while the torrent tore around her with raging fury, in its onward relentless course battering and bruising the delicate limbs.

It was at considerable risk to their own lives that Ralph and Count Carlitti, and other brave men with them, crept cautiously and with the greatest difficulty along the trunk of the tree, over the greater part of which the water was still rushing. By dint of clinging with their all

strength to the upstanding branches they at last succeeded after many vain attempts and countless perils, in reaching the tossed, unconscious form.

Count Carlitti clung on to Ralph with all his force, while the latter laid himself down flat on the trunk, and set about cutting away, as best he could, the remnants of Pearl's clothing from the branches. After a wearisome, and what appeared an endless time, this difficult task was at length successfully accomplished, enabling them to drag the inanimate body gently and tenderly along the trunk of the tree, finally rescuing it from the watery bed in which it had been helplessly tossed by the stormy elements for so many hours.

As Ralph bent his head, resting it on her breast, his face brightened somewhat.

"Her heart beats," he murmured. "Thank God she still lives."

Between them they bore her home, and laid her with loving care on the little bed from which Pearl Nugent was fated never to rise again, for human skill was unavailing.

The army doctor from Hong-Kong, who some weeks before had attended Martinworth, was still at Chuzenji. He did his utmost to relieve all pain, and indeed on recovering consciousness Pearl suffered but little. Her spine, independent

of other severe internal injuries, was discovered fatally damaged, and Pearl and those around her knew that she was dying. She lingered all that day and all the next, sweet and patient to the end. Rosina and Amy and Lady Martinworth were there. They never left the bedside, and the latter's medical knowledge and gentle, experienced nursing helped greatly to lighten and relieve those last sad and distressing days.

Shortly after Mrs. Nugent had awakened from the deathlike swoon that had lasted so many hours, and when in spite of her diminishing forces she was quite capable of understanding what was wanted of her, she slowly and painfully turned her head on the pillow, and letting her veiled orbs linger on the face bending over her, she read the mute question expressed by Lady Martinworth's miserable eyes.

She put out her hand and gently drew her face to hers.

"He is—drowned," she whispered. "We were —together. The boat upset—in the storm."

That was all. And surely when her spirit stands in judgment before the Throne, Pearl Nugent will be pardoned for having said no more.

She would lie silent and motionless, with her beautiful soft grey eyes, dark with the shadow of death, wide open, while from time to time she

would smile with an angelic sweetness at the three women who were watching her.

She spoke but little. Indeed with these few rare exceptions she hardly noticed her watchers, for her thoughts seemed far away from all earthly things. The next day, however, towards the end, as Amy, weeping, was leaning over the bed, she smiled back into her eyes, and whispered very low:

"It is—best so, Amy, dear. Do not weep—for *me. I am quite content—more content, more at* peace than I have been—for many, many long years. If I had lived—I should not have been happy—nor—should I—have made others—Stanislas—dear, good kind Stanislas—happy. Yes,—it is—best so. I am—quite ready,—quite —willing to—die. No more—difficulties, or—dread, or—terrible indecision,—or—uncertainty now. No more unhappiness—now. All—soon will be made—clear, Amy, dear. When—I am gone—be kind—to Stanislas,—poor—Stanislas, for—he—will grieve, and thank—God—he—will never—know—now, never—know—now. Do not—weep for me, darling. I—have—always—loved—you—Amy. Please—please—do not—weep—so."

And then after a minute or two she sighed and asked: "Where—is he?"

"Ralph went to Tokyo at once to tell him,"

answered Amy, her voice choked with sobs. "Telegraphic communication has been interrupted by the storm, and the road is washed away. No one can go down or come up from Nikko. Ralph, however, will have got there, Pearl, my darling, even if he had to climb twenty mountains. They will soon be here, darling."

"Yes," whispered Pearl softly, "he will be here —before I die. He is—coming. He knows—I want him. But he—will grieve, poor—Stanislas, —poor—true—heart, he—will grieve,—but—thank God !—he will—never—know—now."

Then she turned her head, and for the last time, and in unbroken silence, she gazed out far before her at the mountains and the lake.

It was the following morning shortly after dawn that the doctor told them she could not last much longer. And even as he was making this sad announcement Stanislas de Güldenfeldt, accompanied by Ralph, who had met him half way to Tokyo, weary and worn and travel stained, appeared outside the house.

Pearl, who had been lying partially unconscious for many hours, suddenly awoke from her torpor, and raising her head from the pillow, gazed fixedly with shining eyes through the open *shoji*.

"Stanislas has come ! He is near me !" she called in a clear and ringing voice. "Bring him to me."

Rosina exchanged a glance of surprise with Amy as she left the room, for from where Pearl was lying in bed it was impossible for her to see her lover, and silence reigned,—no word had been spoken.

Stanislas de Güldenfeldt, exhausted by sorrow and fatigue, went alone into the room of his dying love. And when, over an hour later, the others, anxious at the ominous silence, ventured within the death-chamber, they found him kneeling by the bedside—unconscious,—his dark hair mingling on the pillow with Pearl's auburn curls, while her dead cheek was pressed against his lips, and her dead arms were clasped around his neck.

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Stanislas never completely recovered from the shock and grief of Pearl's tragic death. Shortly following her loss he left the Diplomatic Service. He was strongly advised against this step by his many friends, amongst whom, as his truest and his best, he counted not only the Rawlinsons and Sir Ralph and Lady Nicholson, but his former colleague, Count Carlitti, who in fair Japan, falling a victim to the freshness of Muriel Millward-Fraser, had promptly, within two

months of Mrs. Nugent's death, placed his ancient name and title, to say nothing of his "leetle fortune," in all their completeness at the extremely pretty feet of "*cette belle jeune fille Anglaise.*"

But the counsels of de Güldenfeldt's friends fell on deaf ears. He took a hatred for the Service, and never for a moment in the future did he regret his former busy and interesting life. He made England the country of his adoption, buying himself a small but beautiful estate in one of the western counties. There, surrounded by his lovely garden and orchid houses, his books, and portraits and souvenirs of Pearl, he passed—if not a happy—at any rate a peaceful existence, and when not at home he spent much of his time with the Nicholsons, whose lovely place was in the adjoining county.

His devotion to his god-daughter, Pearl Nicholson, was profound. And to her alone was he ever known to mention the name of his dead love. Many were the talks that this strange pair, the elderly, saddened man and the innocent child, held on this subject. But to the last, to no other person, not even to Rosina or to Amy, did Stanislas de Güldenfeldt ever refer directly to that unforgotten page that influenced every thought and action of his life.

This sweet confidence between the man and child had arisen in this way.

Seven or eight years after Pearl's death, while the Nicholsons were paying their annual visit to Lynlath, Stanislas entered one day, somewhat unexpectedly, into his library. There, in front of a full length and most successful portrait of Mrs. Nugent, painted after her death from photographs and description, was standing, with uplifted head and sorrowful visage — his little god-daughter. The child's hands were clasped behind her back, and the same gleam of sun that lit up the sweet, lovely face of the portrait fell across the golden locks of the little girl, as she turned towards Stanislas with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"You have, godpapa," she said, "so many pictures of this beautiful lady with the large grey eyes. What lovely hair she has! But what a sad, sad face! I feel I love her so, and often and often I come in here and look at her, and she seems to talk to me. Tell me about her, godpapa. Did you love her too?"

And Stanislas de Güldenfeldt took Pearl's namesake on his knee, and with sad eyes gazing back far into the past he told her of his eternal love.